148 PAGES OF THE BEST COMICS FEATURES, INTERVIEWS & REVIEWS

COMIC HEROES

COMICS FOR EVERYONE

EXCLUSIVE

CIVIL WAR 2

STARK VS CAPTAIN MARVEL IN A SUPER SCRAP

X-MEN

APOCALYPSE WARS PREVIEW & THE 20 ESSENTIAL X-MEN ADVENTURES

+ PAUL DINI

ATTACK ON TITAN

RAT QUEENS

STAR WARS

CHARLES SOULE ON OBI-WAN & ANAKIN

Future

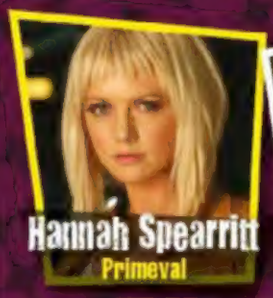
APRIL 2016

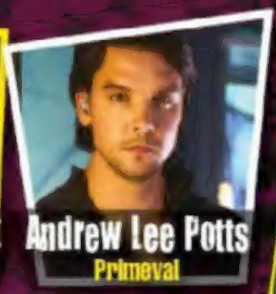
PRINTED IN THE UK £7.99

27

9 772042 807022

Swindon Film and Comic Con 2016


Hannah Spearritt
Primeval


Andrew Lee Potts
Primeval

Ian McNeice
Doctor Who

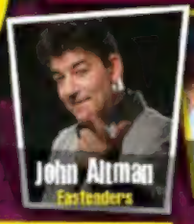
First ever signing

Eddie Kidd
Movie Stuntman

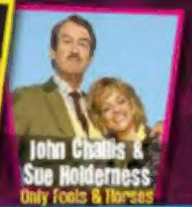
Norman Lovett
Red Dwarf

Kai Owen
Torchwood

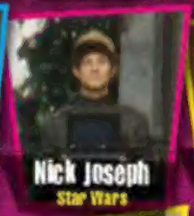
Jack Klaff
Star Wars


John Altman
Eastenders

Lee McDonald & Erkan Mustafa
Grange Hill


John Challis & Sue Holderness
Only Fools & Horses

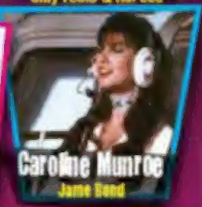
Chris Muncke
Star Wars


Nick Joseph
Star Wars

Salo Gardner
Star Wars

Miltos Yerolemou
Game of Thrones

Martine Beswick
James Bond


Caroline Munroe
James Bond

June 4th 5th at STEAM GWR

Museum of the Great Western Railway
Fire Fly Avenue, Swindon SN2 2EY

One of the South West's largest Comic Cons welcomes you to a weekend full of excitement for all ages and fandoms.

Mike Edmonds
Star Wars

Pam Rose
Star Wars

Alan Flyng
Star Wars

Pixue Le Knot
Game of Thrones

Steven Wickham
Doctor Who

Simon Fisher-Becker
Doctor Who

Arti Shah
The Force Awakens

Clem So
The Force Awakens

Ian Whyte
Predator

Anna Karen
On The Buses

Lee Townsend
Marvel & DC artist

Lee Bradley
Comic artist

Guests/Cars are subject to work commitments
Not all are appearing on both days. Guests are charging for autographs.

Movie Cars

Over 40 guests

(more to be added) from the world of Film/TV/Sport and Comics

Professional Cosplayers

Andrew Lawden's Jedi Academy

Movie talks and photo sessions

GWR Railway Museum experience

Trophies for best costumes

Delicious food/snacks

PLUS MUCH MORE!

Over 50 stands of memorabilia throughout museum

Props include

Doctor Who displays
Ironman Pods
Terminator collection
Ghostbusters display

www.swindoncomiccon.com

TICKETS NOW ON SALE

Swindon-comic-con 2016

swindoncomiccon

5% discount for SFX readers
Quote: SFX16
when ordering tickets

COMIC HEROES
COMICS FOR EVERYONE

Editor Will Salmon
Art Editors Nicky Gotobed, Mark Mitchell
Production Editor Alex Summersby
Special Editions Editor Rosie Fletcher

CONTRIBUTORS
Zainab Akhtar, Carl Anka, Sam Ashurst, David Barnett, David Bradley, Abigail Chandler, Sean Egan, Mike Garley, Paul Gravett, Miles Hamer, Marc Jackson, Stephen Jewell, Stephen Kelly, Graham Kibble-White, Rob Lane, James Lovegrove, Andy McGregor, Joel Meadows, Leah Moore, Dom Reseigh-Lincoln, Alex Thomas, Sara Westrop.

COMIC HEROES WOULD LIKE TO THANK...
Clark Bull, Mel Caylo, Noel Clarke, Megan Davis, Chris D'Lando, Aub Driver, Richard Edwards and SFX, Cara Fielder, Nigel Kitching, Rachel Kilbury, Mark Millar, Michael Molcher, Tim Pilcher, Paul Smith, Matthew West, Jo Witherington.

ADVERTISING
Commercial Sales Director Clare Dove
Advertising Director Andrew Church
Advertising Manager Michael Pyatt
Account Director Adrian Hill 01225 687112

MARKETING
Direct Marketing Manager Adam Jones 01225 687105
Group Marketing Manager Laura Driffield 01225 687464
Marketing Manager Kristianne Stanton

CIRCULATION AND LICENSING
Trade Marketing Manager Michelle Brock
0207 429 3683 michelle.brock@seymour.co.uk
Senior Licensing & Syndication Manager Matt Ellis
(0)1225 442244 Matt.Ellis@futurenet.com

PRINT, PRODUCTION & DISTRIBUTION
Premedia and cover manipulation Gary Stuckey
Production Controllers Nola Cokely, Vivienne Turner
Production Manager Mark Constance

Printed in the UK by William Gibbons & Sons Ltd on behalf of Future. Distributed by Seymour Distribution Ltd, 2 East Poultry Avenue, London EC1A 9PT. Tel: 0207 429 4000
Overseas distribution by Seymour International

MANAGEMENT
Group Editor-in-Chief Jane Crowther
Group Art Director Graham Dalzell
Editorial Director Paul Newman
Managing Director Joe McEvoy

Content and Marketing Director Nial Ferguson
All email addresses are firstname.lastname@futurenet.com

SUBSCRIPTIONS
UK reader order line and enquiries 0844 848 2852
Overseas reader order line & enquiries +44 (0)1604 251 045
Online www.myfavouritemagazines.co.uk
Email contact@myfavouritemagazines.co.uk

Future

Future is an award-winning international media group and leading digital business. We reach more than 49 million international consumers a month and create world-class content and advertising solutions for passionate consumers online, on tablet and smartphone and in print.

Future plc is a public company quoted on the London Stock Exchange (symbol: FUTR).
www.futureplc.com

Chief executive Zillah Byng-Thorne
Non-executive chairman Peter Allen
Chief financial officer Penny Ladkin-Brand
Tel +44 (0)207 042 4000 (London) +44 (0)1225 442 244 (Bath)

All contents © 2016 Future Publishing Limited or published under licence. All rights reserved. No part of this magazine may be reproduced, stored, transmitted or used in any way without the prior written permission of the publisher. Future Publishing Limited (company number 2008885) is registered in England and Wales. Registered office: Quay House, The Ambury, Bath, BA1 1UA. All information contained in this publication is for information only and is, as far as we are aware, correct at the time of going to press. Future cannot accept any responsibility for errors or inaccuracies in such information.

You are advised to contact manufacturers and retailers directly with regard to the price and other details of products or services referred to in this publication. Apps and websites mentioned in this publication are not under our control. We are not responsible for their contents or any changes or updates to them. If you submit unsolicited material to us, you automatically grant Future a licence to publish your submission in whole or in part in all editions of the magazine, including licensed editions worldwide and in any physical or digital format throughout the world. Any material you submit is sent at your risk and, although every care is taken, neither Future nor its employees, agents or subcontractors shall be liable for loss or damage.

recycle
When you have finished with this magazine please recycle it.
We encourage you to recycle this magazine, either through your usual household recyclable waste collection service or at a recycling site.

MIX
Paper from responsible sources
FSC® C007184
We are committed to only using magazine paper which is derived from well managed, certified forestry and chlorine-free manufacture. Future Publishing and its paper suppliers have been independently certified in accordance with the rules of the FSC (Forest Stewardship Council)

WELCOME!

EDITOR'S PHOTO © 2015 KEVIN LOWE

You may have noticed that there's a new X-Men movie out soon. With that in mind, we thought it was time we checked in on the Children of the Atom. This issue presents our pick of the 20 best X-Men stories, as well as previewing the ace-looking *Apocalypse Wars* crossover.

Elsewhere you'll find a wide-ranging interview with Charles Soule, Paul Dini talking about his incredible new graphic novel *Dark Night*, Tess Fowler on the ever-wonderful *Rat Queens*, and Noel Clarke talking about the origins of his kick ass superhero book, *The Troop*.

We also have some fascinating retrospective pieces. Mark Millar and Nigel Kitching were incredibly generous with their time for our piece on *The Saviour*. And we get in-depth on the history of *Action* – the subversive '70s comic that scared the national press. Plus all the usual news, interviews, reviews and stews. Okay, not that last one.

Finally, a big thank-you to everyone who came out to our launch party. We were bowled over by the turnout (as anyone who witnessed my terrified expression will be able to attest...). Thanks, as always, for reading.

Will

Will Salmon, Editor

CONTENTS

Issue 27 / April 2016

148 PAGES OF THE BEST COMICS FEATURES, INTERVIEWS & REVIEWS
COMIC HEROES
COMICS FOR EVERYONE
CIVIL WAR 2
STARK VS CAPTAIN MARVEL IN A SUPER SCRAP
X-MEN
APOCALYPSE WARS PREVIEW & THE 10 ESSENTIAL X-MEN ADVENTURES
ATTACK ON TITAN
CHARLES SOULE ON OBI-WAN & ANAKIN

NEWS

6 / HEAT VISION

The latest comics news, including: The return of Rom and the Micronauts; Valiant's *4001 AD* crossover; DC Rebirth; Glasgow's Comic Invention exhibition and more...

14 / OPINION

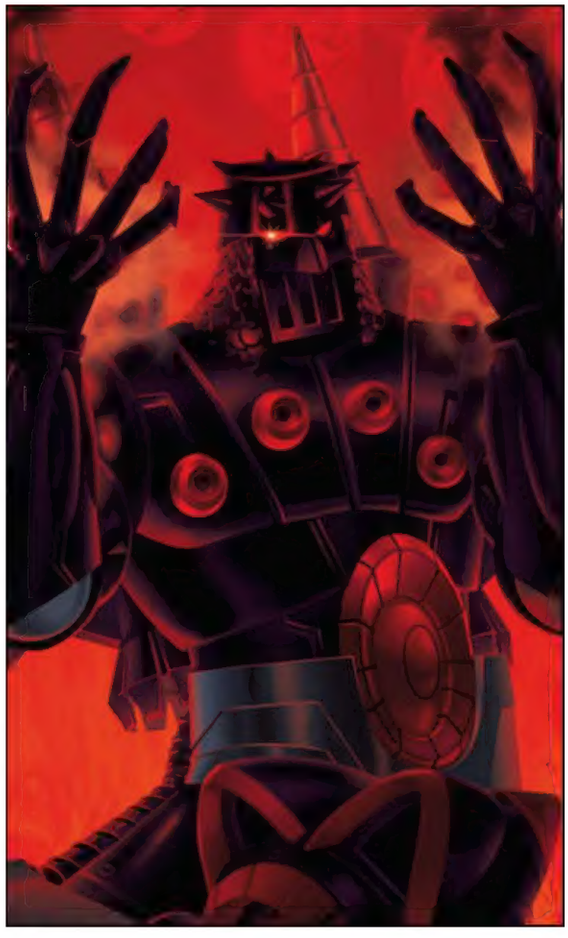
Leah Moore on writing pictures and drawing stories.

16 / KA-PUNCH

Our very own superhero continues his adventures.

18 / SPLASH PAGES

We preview the glorious *Koma* from Pierre Wazem and Frederik Peeters.



SHAPERS OF WORLDS

20 / ERIC STEPHENSON

The Image Publisher and writer of *Nowhere Men* tells all about the book's return.

22 / BRIAN STELFREEZE

Black Panther's artist extraordinaire on T'Challa's new adventures.

24 / JILL THOMPSON

The legendary artist/writer on *Scary Godmother* and *Beasts Of Burden*.

26 / ANDI EWINGTON

The *Overrun* creator tells us about creating his cyber-epic.

FEATURES

28 / WHEN GOOD MUTANTS GO TO WAR
The creators of Apocalypse Wars tell us why we should be hyped for this summer's X-Men crossover.

36 / THE 20 BEST X-MEN STORIES
Counting down our favourites from Marvel's mutants...

42 / THEY MIGHT BE GIANTS
We look behind the scenes of smash hit manga, *Attack On Titan*.

50 / THE LONG DARK KNIGHT OF THE SOUL
Paul Dini and Eduardo Risso tell us about their new Batman tale.

54 / RETURN TO RIVERDALE
It's the coolest comic on the stands (oh yes it is). We chat to Mark Waid about *Archie*.

60 / A CALL TO ARMS
It's Stark vs Danvers in *Civil War 2*!

64 / FAMILY TIES
Noel Clarke on his subversive super-book, *The Troop*.

68 / THE BUSIEST MAN IN COMICS?
Charles Soule talks *Star Wars*, Daredevil and... being a lawyer?!

76 / SHOCK AND AWE
We profile AfterShock – one of the most exciting new comics publishers around.

80 / THE ART OF TESS FOWLER
Rat Queen's penciller shares the best of her own work.

88 / ANIMAL MAGIC
We meet the creators of the hip indie book, *Beast Wagon*.

98 / THE FIRST COMING
Looking back on Mark Millar's debut comic – *The Saviour*.

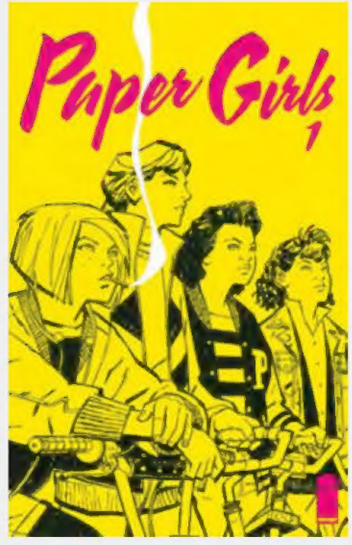
106 / THE SEVENPENNY NIGHTMARE
The British comic that adults hated, but children adored – *Action*!

114 / WORLD OF COMICS
Paul Gravett interviews French comics legend, Blutch.

146 / MY LIFE IN COMICS
Doctor Who scribe, George Mann.

REVIEWS

121 / Get the lowdown on *Paper Girls*, *Superman: American Alien*, *Grayson*, *Irmina*, *Sex Criminals* and many more.



INDIE COMICS

136 / CREATING INDIE COMICS
Mike Garley explores crowdfunding

144 / STATE OF INDEPENDENTS
We pick out the best of the latest indie comics.

HEAT VISION

THE HOTTEST NEWS FROM THE COMICS WORLD

"Why has it taken us so long to return?!"

TOY STORIES

Rom and the Micronauts are coming back to comics, as **Stephen Jewell** finds out

Arguably as well known for their classic runs at Marvel in the '80s as they are for their original action figures, Rom and the Micronauts have been largely absent from comics for the past three decades. But now the cybernetic Space Knight and the miniature warriors are set to make their long anticipated return. Although they were previously integrated into Marvel continuity, licence owners Hasbro are keen to stress that the new comics, published by IDW, are a fresh start for both properties.

"There hasn't been a Rom comic in 30 years, so accessibility was important to us," says IDW Editor-In-Chief Chris Ryall, who is co-writing *Rom: The Space Knight* with Christos Gage. "We want to introduce Rom, his antagonists the Dire Wraiths, and the Earth people he comes into contact with in a way that will get people invested in the new story."

An alternative cover for *Micronauts* #1.

Illustrated by David Messina and Paolo Villanelli, some changes have been made to Rom's design, giving him fingers and new boots, and modifying some of his weaponry. "Part of our approach is acknowledging that a Space Knight who travels the universe would be able to adapt to different situations and environments," reasons Gage. "So Rom and some of his equipment won't always have the same form."

Beginning with a special Free Comic Book Day issue in May before his monthly series begins in July, the story begins with Rom arriving on Earth and coming into contact with its inhabitants. "*Rom* #1 establishes the character's world in a big and hopefully very unexpected way," teases Ryall. "From there, things will only grow bigger and crazier."

MINIATURE HEROES

In contrast, *Micronauts*, which debuts this month, will initially take place in the quantum realm of Microspace, as our diminutive heroes – whose ranks include Orizon Rael, the captain of the Heliopolis; Phenelo-Phi, "who has appropriated some Space Glider technology"; and no-nonsense mercenary Larissa – are caught in the middle of a civil war between the armies of the noble Force Commander and the villainous Baron Karza.

"It's been terrific fun, because it's all new," says *Uncanny X-Men* scribe Cullen Bunn, who is teaming up with artist David Baldeon. "I'm creating connections between the technology, the alien races and the mysterious magic that fuels the universe. Microspace is dying and collapsing in upon itself, and no one knows why."

The gloriously retro *Rom* cover.

> "MICROSPACE IS COLLAPSING AND NO ONE KNOWS WHY"

However, future arcs will see the Micronauts visit Earth, "because if you're going to have super-small characters, you really need to show them adventuring in our gargantuan world," says Bunn, who is interested in exploring the Micronauts' mythological aspects despite recent technological advancements in nanotechnology. "I was more concerned with some of the fantastical elements of their universe," he admits. "It's super-science meets super-magic, and that has really influenced my vision for the series."

And while each series will stand alone to start with, Ryall isn't ruling out any future team-ups between the pair, or even some other Hasbro heavyweights, such as *Transformers* or *GI Joe*, whose comics IDW also publishes. "We've got some big plans for *Rom* and *Micronauts*," he says. "But first we want to establish both series and the characters in their own right, but there are big – and small – exciting things to come from there."

ALL IMAGES © IDW

41ST CENTURY CROSSOVER

Editor **Kyle Andrukiewicz** shines the spotlight on Valiant's epochal summer event *4001 AD*

Above: *4001 AD* and tie-in issues of other Valiant titles such as *Rai* will feature stunning cover art by the likes of Clayton Crain and David Mack.

While Valiant's upcoming summer event is set in the far-flung future, the tale that *4001 AD* chronicles is as old as humankind itself. Beginning with a special Free Comic Book Day issue, the four-issue mini-series sees *Rai*'s current creative team of Matt Kindt and Clayton Crain taking the fallen spirit guardian's ongoing battle against supposedly benevolent artificial intelligence Father beyond the dystopian confines of New Japan and into the vast post-apocalyptic environs that surround his high-tech homeland.

"*Rai* has been building towards this over the past two years and, when Matt turned in his pitch for *4001 AD*, we knew that it needed the biggest stage possible," says editor Kyle Andrukiewicz. "The story itself is primal and compelling, as at its heart it's about a son's final act of rebellion against an abusive father. But the father believes what he's doing is best not just for his son, but his entire family. And that's what's compelling about Father, as he truly loves New Japan."

Apart from Rai himself, *4001 AD* entails appearances from many of Valiant's other leading lights. "It capitalises on the fact that even though the future world Rai inhabits is integrally entwined with the Valiant Universe, it is also a fully-realised universe of its own," reasons Andrukiewicz. "So I guess it's just a lucky perk that this conflict happens to involve giant mechs, floating continents, transforming super weapons, space, and the legacies of everyone's favourite Valiant characters including X-O Manowar, Bloodshot, Shadowman, Eternal Warrior, and more than a few surprise guests."

The series will also have an impact on the modern-day Valiant Universe with a number of tie-ins, scripted by that title's incumbent writer. "*4001 AD* will have major repercussions for the direction of *Rai* moving forward as well as setting the stage for some of our characters in the present," explains Andrukiewicz. "As far as how they link with the main story, I think fans really liked what we did with *Book Of Death* last summer, which was stories that are set firmly within the conceit of the event that can be read on their own while also enhancing the overall narrative, so we'll give you enough to know what state the X-O Manowar mech armour is in *4001 AD*, but something as cool as that deserves a spotlight all its own and we think readers will feel the same way."

With Andrukiewicz insisting that "Matt and everyone else at Valiant has been so eager to tell this story just so we can get to see Clayton draw it," *4001 AD*'s even more ambitious scenario enables Crain's impressive painted artwork to encompass an even wider canvas of characters and locales. "His style is unlike anyone else's in the industry and, given his influences, this story has been tailored to him," says Andrukiewicz. "When readers see the opening sequence of the second issue, I hope they appreciate how difficult it is to properly choreograph a fight sequence in a comic book on that scale."

The 4001 AD FCBD Special and 4001 AD #1 are published in May.

CLEAN SLATE FOR DC

Rebirth is nearly upon us, but don't call it a reboot...

Do you like new Issue Ones? If you're a DC reader then you're about to be faced with a whole lot of them. Rumoured for weeks and finally officially announced at the ComicsPRO event in February, DC Rebirth is a line-wide relaunch that will encompass the company's entire superhero line.

Rebirth is, in the words of DC Co-Publisher Dan DiDio, "designed to bring back the best of DC's past, embrace the stories we currently love and move the entire epic universe into the future. We are returning to the essence of the DCU."

In effect, it sounds a great deal like Rebirth is an attempt to reconcile the company's controversial reboot, the New 52, with the older DC universe. Following the 80-page one-shot *DC Rebirth #1*, penned by Geoff Johns with art by Ethan Van Sciver, Ivan Reis, Gary Frank and Phil Jimenez, all titles will reset their issue numbers – with two exceptions. *Detective Comics* and *Action Comics* will be going back to their original numbering – #934 and #957 respectively. There will also be a number of Rebirth specials.

Interestingly, pricing is dropping across the entire line, from $3.99 to a far more tempting $2.99. It's a smart move – though not an entirely altruistic one. Ten of the company's more popular titles (including *Batman*, *Wonder Woman*, *The Flash* and *Superman*) will be shifting to a twice-monthly schedule, and keeping them at a higher price point might have been a bit too much to ask of even the most dedicated fans.

What we don't know yet is who will actually be working on the titles. Full details of the creative teams assigned to the new slate are still to be announced – though we know some of the titles. Aside from the usual suspects there are some intriguing curveballs, including spinoff *The Super Man* and a *Blue Beetle* solo book.

It's not all good news, however – several titles have been axed in the relaunch, including the acclaimed *Black Canary* and *Midnighter*.

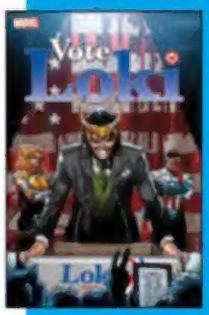
We'll have more on Rebirth in *Comic Heroes* as DC reveals more.

Above: Some of the most iconic characters in comics are "returning to their essence". Again.

IN THE FRAME

ANNOUNCEMENTS, INFO AND OTHER INTERESTING STUFF...

ON THE CAMPAIGN TRAIL



Think Donald Trump as US President is a crazy idea? It could be worse... Marvel has announced *Vote Loki* – a new book to debut in June which features the Asgardian trickster trying to win American hearts and minds for no doubt nefarious reasons. Hey, it's election year.

WATCH YOUR BACK, JOE

Judge Dredd creator John Wagner has announced that he intends to kill off a major *2000 AD* character soon. Although he told the comic's official Thrill Cast that he doesn't enjoy ex-ing characters, he warned that "one is going soon. I'm not going to say who – but watch out."

HAIR (METAL) TODAY...

Retired rockers Mötley Crüe have had their debauched and big-haired story immortalised in comic form. *Mötley Crüe: Livin' The Fast Life* is written and illustrated by Jayfri Hashim and Michael Frizell. It's out now from Storm.

SCALPED ON SCREEN

Jason Aaron and R.M. Guéra's Vertigo crime drama *Scalped* has been picked up for possible TV adaptation. Warner Horizon and DC Entertainment are currently developing a pilot for the show.

IMAGES © THE RESPECTIVE PROPRIETORS

SEASON OF THE WITCH

Author **Ben Aaronovitch** tells **Stephen Jewell** about the second run of his Rivers Of London comic

Titan's adaptation of Ben Aaronovitch's *Rivers Of London* novels continues with a second arc, "The Night Witch". But although it takes place in the build-up to novel *The Hanging Tree* – the next installment in the literary adventures of PC Peter Grant, out in June – Aaronovitch insists that the five-issue comic can still be enjoyed on its own merits.

"It does indeed precede the new book, but it doesn't especially lead into it," says Aaronovitch, who is again co-writing with veteran comics and *Doctor Who* scribe, Andrew Cartmel. "You can read the book with no knowledge of the comic, and vice versa. It's exaggerating to say that it's a prequel to the new novel, so we've just stated that "The Night Witch" comes before it to clarify the timeline for those people who care about these things – such as us!"

Left and above: Some of the gorgeous cover art for *Rivers Of London: The Night Witch*.

Beginning with some Russian hoodlums getting more than they bargained for after they storm a prison van carrying a very powerful prisoner, Aaronovitch is reluctant to give too much away about the new series, although he and Cartmel have been doing plenty of homework.

"We've done a lot of extensive research into the Russian expatriate community in London and to that end, we both read an excellent book called *Londongrad* by Mark Hollingsworth and Stewart Lansley," he notes, revealing that some significant London landmarks will again figure prominently in the plot. "There's a sequence that makes brilliant use of the Heron Tour skyscraper, thanks to the magnificent artwork of Lee Sullivan and Luis Guerrero."

According to Aaronovitch, Guerrero's colours perfectly compliment Sullivan's linework. "They add a new dimension to the art, as they lend mood, atmosphere, reality and detail," he says. "Both of those guys constantly surprise and delight us with the nuance and minutiae they add to everything from buildings to people. Characters who formerly existed only as prose constructs have been suddenly and wonderfully brought to visual life. Andrew and I are, however, only too pleased to take credit for any great ideas that they have!"

Rivers of London: The Night Witch #1 is out now through Titan Comics.

THE CRIMES OF CTHULHU?

Van Lente and Vilanova are reuniting for Weird Detective

Harvey-nominated writer Fred Van Lente and illustrator Guiu Vilanova will be working together once more with their new creator-owned series, *Weird Detective*.

With New York plunged into chaos followed a string of bizarre crimes, Detective Sebastian Greene finds himself tracking down monsters and horrors from beyond space and time, all with a distinctly Lovecraftian twist. Meanwhile, Greene himself is carrying a dark secret that his partner must solve.

"I love H. P. Lovecraft, I love cop shows, and their unholy bastard child is *Weird Detective*," says Van Lente. "Seeing cosmic horror at the street crime level opens up both genres to incredible new possibilities."

Lente and Vilanova previously collaborated on *Conan The Avenger*. *Weird Detective* will be manifesting ominously in comic stores in June, with the first issue containing all three parts of the opening tale as originally serialised in *Dark Horse Presents*.

IN THE FRAME

ANNOUNCEMENTS, INFO AND OTHER INTERESTING STUFF...

SOLO GOES SOLO

TIME-TWISTING TURTLES

PSYCHO SERIES

"FOR THE EMPEROR!"

IMAGES © THE RESPECTIVE PROPRIETORS

> “COMICS CULTURE IS ALL AROUND US AND INVENTION IS STILL ONGOING”

COMIC INVENTION

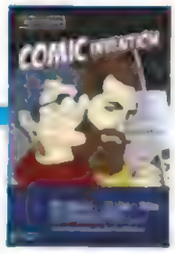
Glasgow is currently hosting a wide-ranging exhibition of comic art, as **Paul Gravett** finds

Laurence Grove is the co-curator of an exhibition exploring how comics have been constantly reinvented.

From Egyptian hieroglyphics to Frank Quitely originals, the multi-themed Comic Invention at the Hunterian Art Gallery in Glasgow mixes ancient and modern, fine art and comics art, Scottish and international, to make four exhibitions in one. *Comic Heroes* spoke to Laurence to find out more.

COMIC HEROES: What are your main goals for this exhibition?

LAURENCE GROVE: That geeks come out saying “This old stuff is cool”, and that stuffy academics come out saying “This Frank Quitely chap does have a modicum of talent”! The exhibition, and the box-set of four catalogues, is open-ended. Each visitor will make their own associations and conclusions that hopefully “think outside the box”.



Above: A Frank Quitely page mixes pictures and words, as does an Egyptian tablet...

Opposite page: And so did *The Glasgow Looking Glass* in 1825

CH: When were comics “invented”?

LG: It is a trick question, as ambiguous as the hybrid text/image high art/low art form itself. We give an answer – Glasgow, 1825 – then tell you it’s not so simple. Any answer depends of course on definitions, including those of comics as we see them today, but asking the question reveals how text/image narrative and its reception saw a turning point with 19th century mass technology. We show how the themes of the past match those of today, that you cannot separate high art from low art, and that every picture tells a story – although not always the story that was intended. Above all, you will discover that the culture of comics is all around us and the invention is still ongoing.

CH: How important has Scotland been to that ongoing invention?

LG: On one very-tartan level, comics owe everything to Scotland. Scotland

CON REPORT

TRUE BELIEVERS 2016

invented comics with *The Glasgow Looking Glass* (1825), developed them with *The Dandy* (1937), produced the world's cultural hub for text/image cultures in Glasgow, and is now home to three of the world's most dynamic graphic novel creators: Mark Millar, Grant Morrison, and Frank Quitely.

Then again, comics depend on the receiver. Each reader creates their own adventure by applying the texts and images before them to their own experiences. So for different people there will be different key moments in comics. That is also how the exhibition works. Audiences in Scotland can relate to Roy Lichtenstein or Andy Warhol, just as readers in LA can enjoy Frank Quitely's Batman in a kilt.

CH: How do you relate Quitely's art to historical work in the exhibition?
LG: Thematically, connecting the developments of the past with the expression of the present. So a 16th-century metamorphosis from Ovid goes well with a metamorphosis from the X-Men. Some medieval bed-hopping fits in with Quitely's eroticism. Or a funeral slab from Ancient Egypt sits next to a story from *The Kingdom Offspring* with the sphinx as centrepiece. But my favourite is Abraham the God-figure from Wenceslas Hollar's 17th-century re-working of the Bible being echoed by the ascendant glory of Superman.

Comic Invention continues till 17 July at The Hunterian Art Gallery, Glasgow

ABOUT LEAH
Leah Moore is a writer of comics, prose and journalism, as well as the co-founder of the revolutionary *Electricomics*. She nas written for *Albion*, *Wild Girls*, *Tom Strong* and more. Follow her on Twitter at **@leahmoore**.

Writing Pictures and Drawing Stories

Comics is defined as a secondary medium, in the way that orange and green are secondary colours. It is seen as the squishing together of two primary media: art! and literature! Media which, if you add the word "great" before them, evoke all kinds of intense cultural associations, like Da Vinci or Tolstoy, Dickens or Turner. Art and literature are top-flight media, in that case. Blue blood, old money, card-carrying legit *proper* ART.

Comics, in that case, are not just seen as a poor cousin, but a web-footed marsh-dwelling banjo-duelling cousin at that. The general public and mainstream journalists absolutely cannot seem to grasp any other point of view. Please god, can I never read another "POW! Have comics grown up?" piece?

What if comics were not actually a secondary medium at all, and are in fact the origin of both art and literature? What if, prior to the Gutenberg bible, Johnson's dictionary, Michaelangelo's ceilings or Caxton's printing press, what if, way back in the dark ages, back in the time of runes and kings and tapestries and carved stone, what if before that in the deepest history of the species, we used pictures and words interchangeably? What if once they were actually the same thing?

The earliest writings are pictures. Written languages as geographically distant as Chinese Hanzi and ancient Sumerian Cuneiform began with little drawings of real things. Moon. Head. Tree. These logograms gradually evolved into characters which meant that thing, and became writing as we would recognise it. Ancient Meso-American writing uses the same basic root as ancient Japanese Kanji, and both do this because Pictionary is easier than Charades. If you dropped me into a completely alien culture, be that 30th century Venus, Stone Age Madagascar, or even Romford, I could, given a bit of dirt and a pointy stick, make crude demands for water, shelter and mercy in the face of their great and terrible gods (that pretty much goes for Venus and Madagascar too, by the way). The paintings at Lascaux, like Australian Aboriginal rock engravings, tell stories as clearly now as they did 20,000 years ago.

Comics is a base language. Combining pictures into sentences that convey a thought or meaning that is modified by the order and context of those pictures seems like a big deal viewed in that respect.

The biggest deal about it, is that it is Nothing Special. It is what comics writers do when they script, and it's what comics artists do when they draw. It's the same part of the brain telling a story with pictographs as we have used for millennia. Yes, that pictograph may currently mean "Squirrel Girl PWNS Wolverine" but who is to say that in 10,000 years it mightn't evolve into the character for "Joy"?

People use this same ancient skill when they tell you in one tweet they are off on holiday to dance with hot boys and hook up, using only five emojis, one of which is an aubergine (this must be possible, please try! @leahmoore).

Toddlers use it when they draw you, and themselves, and the tall ghostly shape behind you with jagged dripping teeth who they call "Mister Smiley!". It's in our DNA.

Comics are not a secondary medium, they're not even a primary medium. In terms of mark making, it is THE ORIGINAL medium, from which all other forms, from Byron to Botticelli, Banksy to Blake descended. POW!

"What if comics were not actually a secondary medium at all, and were in fact the origin of both art and literature?"

PHOTOGRAPH © 2016 BEN COLLIER

CRIME SCENE

THE ULTIMATE GUIDE TO CRIME DRAMA! BOOKS FILM TV

PEAKY BLINDERS *heads up the* COOLEST CRIME SHOWS *coming your way*

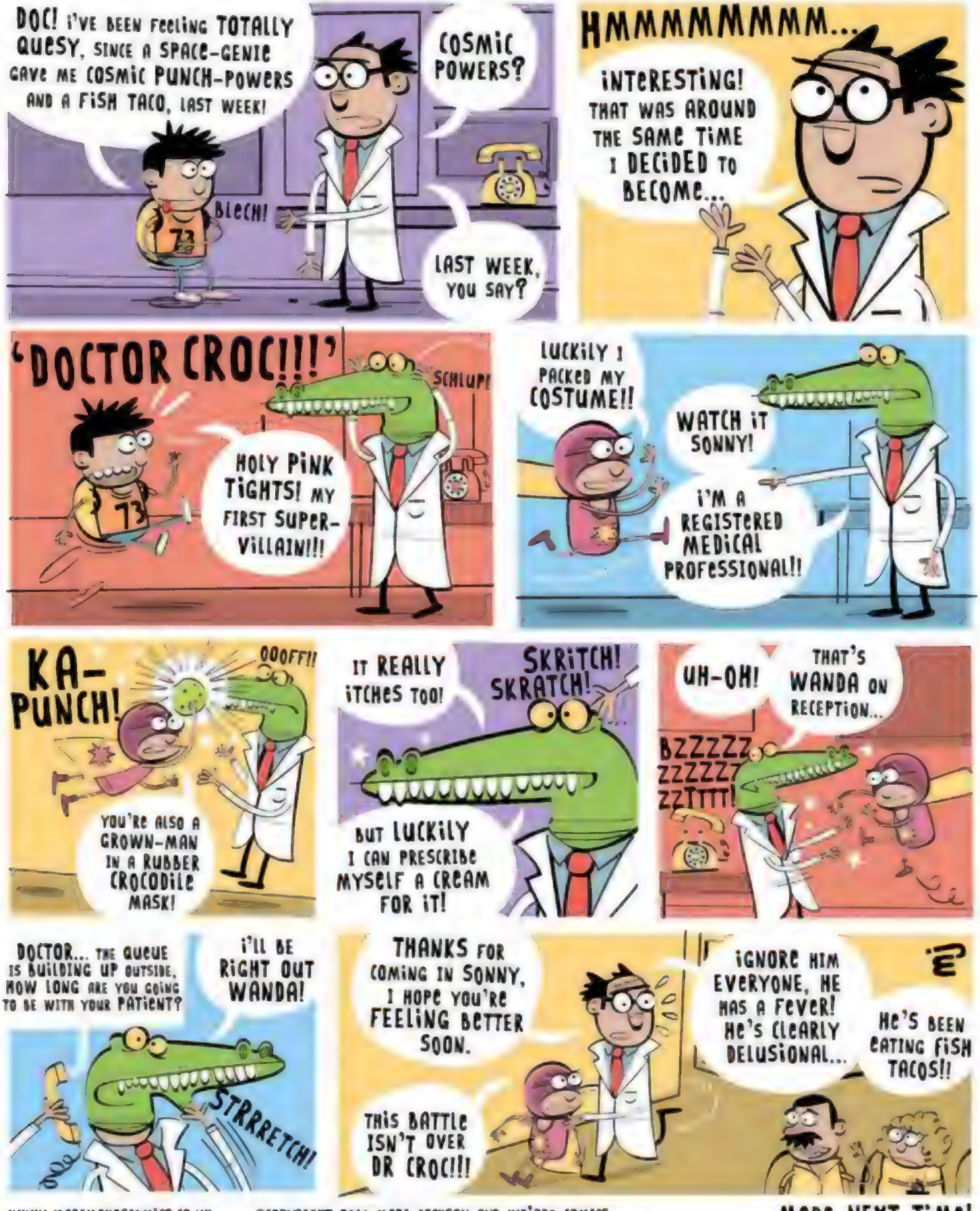
PLUS
MAKING A MURDERER
JONATHAN CREEK
MARK BILLINGHAM
RIPPER STREET

ON SALE NOW

To pick up your copy head to

myfavouritemagazines.co.uk

KA-PUNCH! A COMIC BY MARC JACKSON


DOC! I'VE BEEN FEELING TOTALLY QUESY, SINCE A SPACE-GENIE GAVE ME COSMIC PUNCH-POWERS AND A FISH TACO, LAST WEEK!
BLECH!
COSMIC POWERS?
LAST WEEK, YOU SAY?
HMMMMMMMM...
INTERESTING! THAT WAS AROUND THE SAME TIME I DECIDED TO BECOME...
'DOCTOR CROC!!!'
SCHLUP!
HOLY PINK TIGHTS! MY FIRST SUPER-VILLAIN!!!
LUCKILY I PACKED MY COSTUME!!
WATCH IT SONNY!
I'M A REGISTERED MEDICAL PROFESSIONAL!!
KA-PUNCH!
OOOFF!!
YOU'RE ALSO A GROWN-MAN IN A RUBBER CROCODILE MASK!
IT REALLY ITCHES TOO!
SKRITCH! SKRATCH!
BUT LUCKILY I CAN PRESCRIBE MYSELF A CREAM FOR IT!
UH-OH!
THAT'S WANDA ON RECEPTION...
BZZZZZ ZZZZZZ ZZTTTT!
DOCTOR... THE QUEUE IS BUILDING UP OUTSIDE, HOW LONG ARE YOU GOING TO BE WITH YOUR PATIENT?
I'LL BE RIGHT OUT WANDA!
STRRRETCH!
THANKS FOR COMING IN SONNY, I HOPE YOU'RE FEELING BETTER SOON.
THIS BATTLE ISN'T OVER DR CROC!!!
IGNORE HIM EVERYONE, HE HAS A FEVER! HE'S CLEARLY DELUSIONAL...
HE'S BEEN EATING FISH TACOS!!

WWW.MARCMAKESCOMICS.CO.UK

©COPYRIGHT 2016 MARC JACKSON AND WEIRDO COMICS

MORE NEXT TIME!

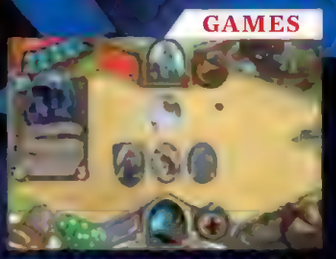
Your essential guide to competitive gaming

PC GAMER PRO

UP YOUR GAME

DON'T MISS A SINGLE **AMAZING MOMENT**

LEARN FROM THE **VERY BEST**



GET MORE FROM YOUR **FAVOURITE GAMES**

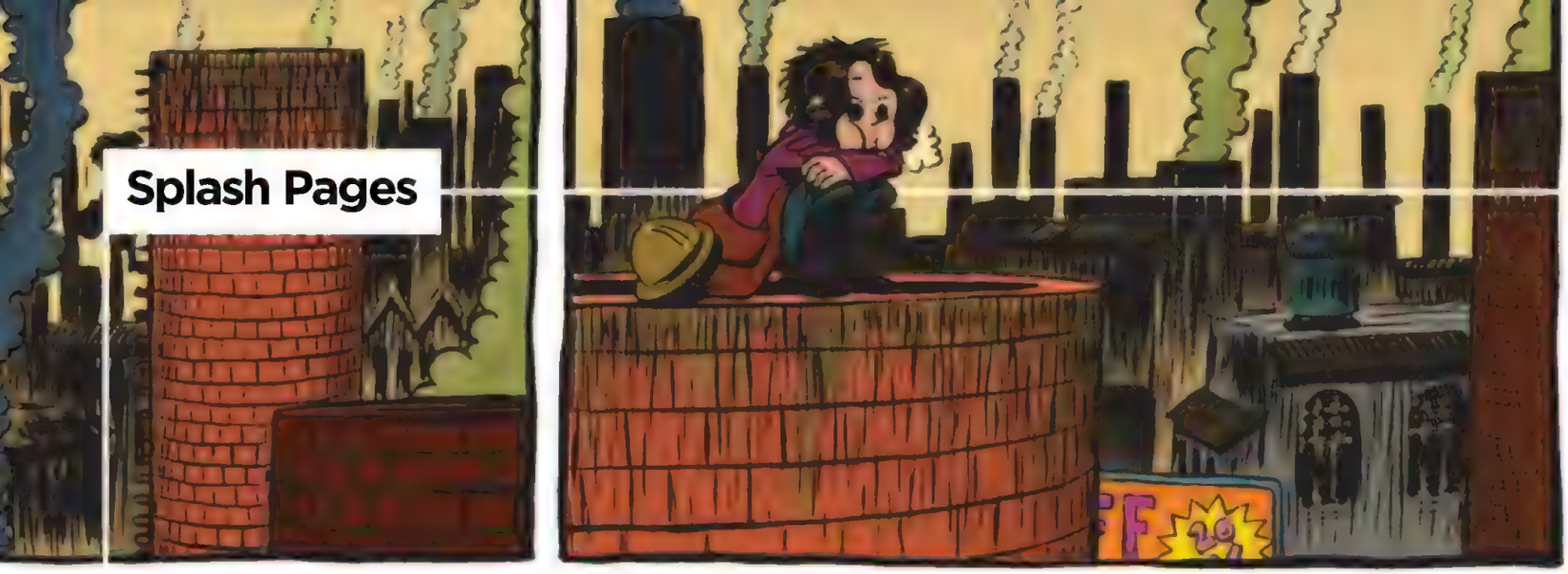
NEW FEATURES AND GUIDES **EVERY DAY**

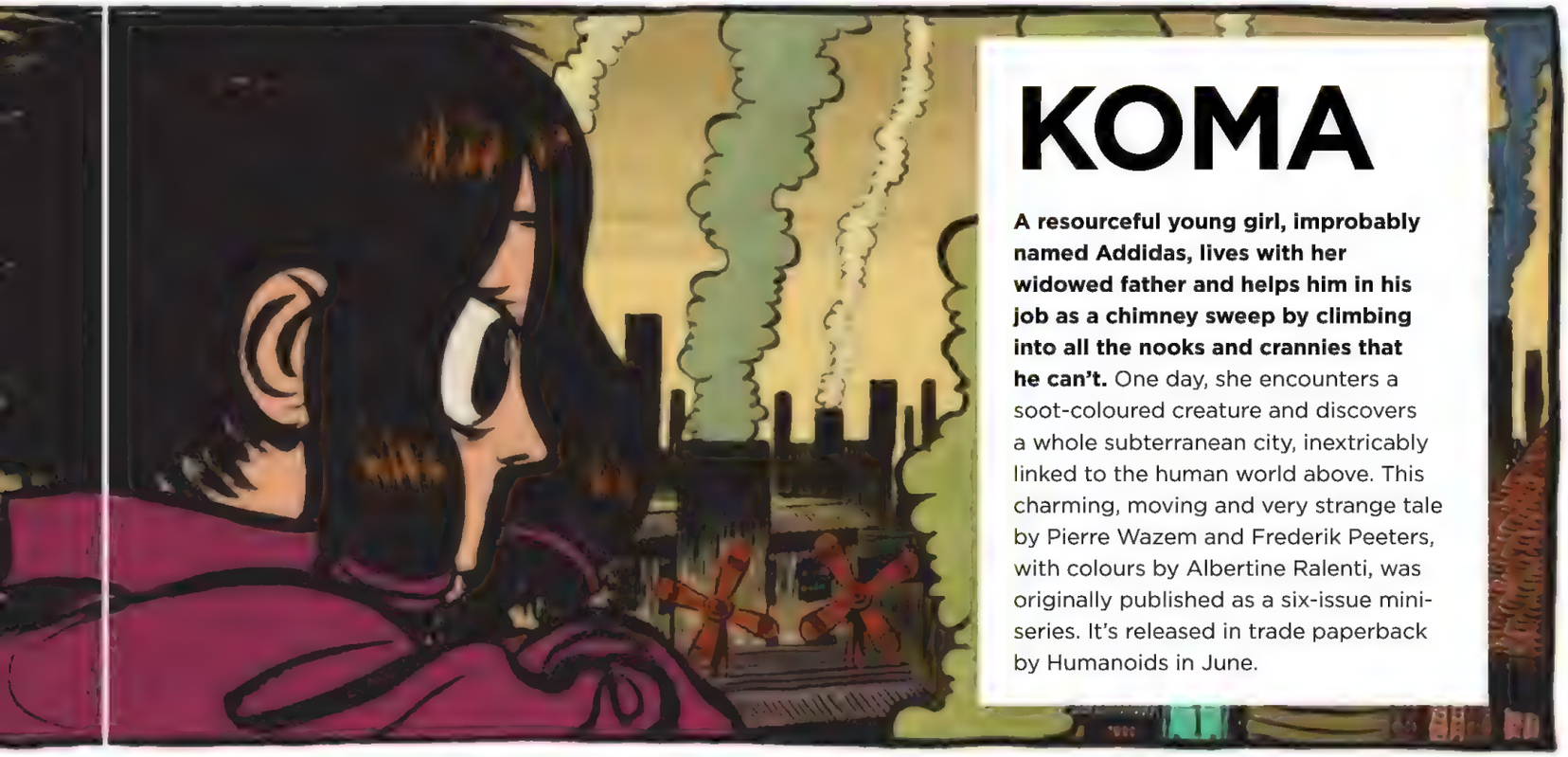
GET STARTED AT

→ www.pcgamer.com/pro

LAUNCH PARTNERS

AVerMedia logitech HYPERX





KOMA

A resourceful young girl, improbably named Addidas, lives with her widowed father and helps him in his job as a chimney sweep by climbing into all the nooks and crannies that he can't. One day, she encounters a soot-coloured creature and discovers a whole subterranean city, inextricably linked to the human world above. This charming, moving and very strange tale by Pierre Wazem and Frederik Peeters, with colours by Albertine Ralenti, was originally published as a six-issue mini-series. It's released in trade paperback by Humanoids in June.

NEWS GREAT ART
?!
ARE YOU REAL?
WAZEM & PEETERS

SHAPERS OF WORLDS

RAPID-FIRE Q&As WITH COMIC CREATORS

ERIC STEPHENSON

As a publisher, Eric Stephenson guides the course of Image Comics, but as a writer he is best known for *Nowhere Men*. **Will Salmon** finds out more about its long-awaited return...

Comic Heroes: For those who missed the first series, how would you sum up *Nowhere Men*?

Eric Stephenson: The four most famous scientists in the world band together to form a company with the lofty goal of making the world a better place, but when things start to go wrong and they all fall out, the world may wind up paying the price. The new series is the second half of the story and deals with the fallout from the events in the first trade.

CH: You're working with some new artists – Dave Taylor and Emi Lenox. What do they bring to the world of *Nowhere Men*?

ES: I was just looking at new pages from Dave, so this interview is well-timed! What I love about Dave is that his work shares many of the same characteristics as [previous *Nowhere Men* artist] Nate Bellegarde's without being a slavish imitation. Dave very much does his own thing and, as the book progresses, he's really kind coming into his own. He was great already, but he's really blossoming as we barrel ahead into this thing.

With Emi it's pretty simple. I wanted to have a portion of this arc be devoted to Monica Strange's sketch diary, and there really wasn't another choice. I think what Emi does with her own work in Emitown is lovely.

> We all knew that it would be an uphill battle to reconnect with our readers

Right: Monica's dream diary realised by the ace Emi Lenox

Below: Issue seven is the first of the new series, but it's very much a continuation of Book One

CH: The series makes artful use of text pages and graphic design as well as "standard" comic pages. What was your intention with these pages?

ES: It was a different way of getting more information into the comic without overburdening the artist. It was a way to flesh out the world without requiring Nate or Dave to draw an entire 30 pages every issue.

CH: Music is very important to *Nowhere Men*. Did it influence the direction of the plot?

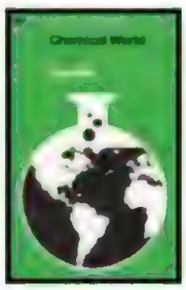
ES: Absolutely. Part of my original inspiration was that line, "and the

papers want to know whose shirts you wear" from David Bowie's "Space Oddity". There are any number of Easter eggs referring to various bands or songs throughout the series. There are aspects of the overall story that are inspired by bits of song lyrics, or even just titles. Everyone focuses on The Beatles when they talk about the book, but there's some Pink Floyd in there, too, and The Who.

CH: What is it about The Beatles that remains so inspiring?
ES: The Beatles are a great story. Even if you strip away their amazing output and their profound influence on not just music, but pop culture in general, theirs is an incredibly compelling story.

CH: Are you planning a third run of *Nowhere Men*?
ES: That remains to be seen, really. We'll see how things go with this bit and how things wrap up. I love working with Dave, Jordie, and Steven, but that said, we could always do something else together. I get restless, frankly, and I think we've well and truly tried even our most ardent supporters' patience with a two year-plus break. We all knew going in it would be an uphill battle to reconnect with readers, so... yeah. We'll see.

CH: Both *Nowhere Men* and your other series, *They're Not Like Us*, are rooted in superhero comics while not actually *being* superbooks. Are they your attempt to do something new with the form?



This page: *Nowhere Men* fleshes out its backstory with news stories, fake textbook covers and other ephemera to create a vivid and convincing fictional world

I SUSPECT YOU'RE EXACTLY RIGHT OF MARIAN IN FACT I THINK THERE'S A GREAT DEAL WE COULD ALL LEARN FROM EACH OTHER
STARTING NOW

ES: It's more about saying that not every comic about extraordinary people has to be about superheroes, really. The world doesn't really need more superhero comics, and after these two books are over, I can't see myself doing much more of anything that involves the word "super." Ultimately all writing is just sorting through the backseats of our minds and seeing what we can pull out, how it all fits together. I loved superhero comics growing up, but I'm just more interested in real people at this point in my life.

CH: Speaking of which, how is *They're Not Like Us* going?
ES: I think we're committed to doing one more arc of that so we can wrap Syd's story up. The third arc will start in the late summer and run through the end of the year or so. I love Syd, and I love the look of that book, but I'm eager to get on to something else at this point. I'm not a big fan of stories that go on forever, and I'd hate to overstay our welcome with his one. The third arc will be... Well, I don't know if "fun" is the best way to describe it, but I think that it's going to be my favourite part of the story.

CH: What can we look forward to from Image in 2016?
ES: New faces. New ideas. New horizons. Change. One of the greatest things about Image is that we're always evolving – it's in our nature. We're always working with different writers and artists, always doing something different, and as a result we're ever-changing. I think that's necessary to remain vital, and I think the overall mood in comics right now is that the industry as a whole needs to go through some very serious changes. I think we can all feel it, and like I said when I spoke at ComicsPRO in February, I think we should look at what's happening now as an opportunity.

CH: How do you juggle your writing and publishing duties?
ES: I do the writing at home, and the publishing at work. Being Publisher – that's my day job. I made a promise to myself early on that I had to keep the two things separate, and I've been pretty good about sticking to that.

IMAGES © IMAGE COMICS

BRIAN STELFREEZE

The *Shadow Of The Bat/Day Men* artist tells **Stephen Jewell** about collaborating with *Atlantic* writer and *Between The World And Me* author Ta-Nehisi Coates on Marvel's new *Black Panther* monthly

COMIC HEROES: What are your earliest memories of the Black Panther?

BRIAN STELFREEZE: It would have been reading Jack Kirby *Fantastic Four* issues. But I really wasn't a fan of Jack's work when I was a kid, so it didn't leave much of an impression, so it would have been Neal Adams and John Buscema (on *Avengers* and Black Panther's 1970s solo title *Jungle Action* respectively) who really started to make me pay attention to the character.

CH: How did you first come to team up with Ta-Nehisi Coates on the new *Black Panther* series?

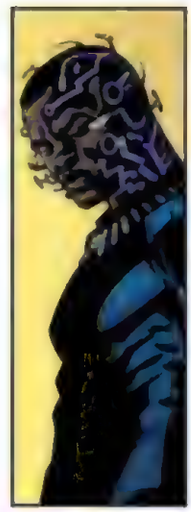
BS: For me, it was all about Marvel editor-in-chief Axel Alonso and editor Wilson Moss. Wil and I worked together a few years ago on an issue of *Jonah Hex* at DC and we've had a great relationship ever since. He was very cagey about getting me to agree to the project before revealing the writer's name. I agreed on the blind because I trusted him, but I did mention we should consider Ta-Nehisi for a fill-in issue! Wil got suspiciously quiet when I mentioned that request…

CH: What's it like working with Ta-Nehisi? Has he taken quickly to the comic book medium?

BS: I was considerably nervous at first. Comics requires a strange set of disciplines from both writers and artists, so both new writers and other people coming in from other media tend to miss the mark and make it all about the dialogue. The most difficult thing to understand is that the storytelling takes precedence over both the writing and the art. But Ta-Nehisi entered the process of collaboration with no ego and magnificent ideas. He is such an easy guy to work with and we've quickly got to the hive mind stage, so now we both just do our best to surprise each other.

CH: *Black Panther* is being released under the "All-New, All-Different" Marvel banner, which is attempting to present a more diverse range of characters, done by a more diverse range of creators. Is that something that is important to you?

This page: The superhero is at the forefront of Marvel's exciting All-New, All-Different banner.



BS: Absolutely. It's funny, but I think all creators have the ability to pull from their personal experiences, and then project and expand those experiences to fit any character. We can use our personal sense of social isolation for a Spider-Man story, or our own sense of injustice writ large to tell a Batman story. I think personal experiences are universal to a certain extent and if you're creative you can tell the story. But I also believe something unique comes from putting diverse people on diverse characters. We can put less energy into being creative and more into just telling the truth.

CH: Wakanda is a big part of the new series. Have you taken a particular approach to illustrating its distinctive geography, clothing and advanced technology?

BS: I went to Japan a while back and I was struck by the fact of within this high-tech city you still had some people walking around in kimonos and traditional clothing. I wanted Wakanda to feel something like that, but at the same time I didn't think the tech should be too obtrusive. Wakanda's technology is a little more organic in the series and I thought it would be a good

ALL IMAGES © 2016 MARVEL

Left: Stelfreeze is known for his cover art, creating more than 50 covers for DC's *Shadow Of The Bat*, and is keen to create his own vision of Wakanda

> I believe something unique comes from putting diverse people on diverse characters

idea for some of the technology to be so advanced that outsiders wouldn't recognise it as tech at all.

CH: Are you inking your own pencils, or working with other artists on the title?
BS: I've gotten to the point where I consider pencilling and inking to be a single discipline, and a page is never really just pencilled. The other artist on the team is colourist extraordinaire Laura Martin. She brings so much depth to the art and story. We've been friends for a while and I've always wanted to work with her, and she just makes it rain!

I did the art and colours for the first issue cover, but Laura will handle colours on subsequent issues. It takes a little pressure off of me and I enjoy what she does.

CH: You're also doing a hip-hop variant cover for the first issue...
BS: I've based that on Jay-Z's *Black Album*, and I actually finished it before I was asked to do the book itself. I thought the hip-hop variants were a great idea and some really cool covers have come out of that.

CH: Have you taken inspiration from any of the artists who have drawn Black Panther in the past?
BS: I loved what Mark Texeira did on his run in the late '90s. That guy draws with the brutality of a MMA [Mixed Martial Arts] fighter! Surprisingly, I think the artist who has influenced me the most on the series is actually Jack Kirby. I'm trying to push a little Jack Kirby influence into the way I'm designing the technology of Wakanda, so I guess I've kind of come full circle on that guy!

JILL THOMPSON

The artist and writer tells **Joel Meadows** about returning to canine-heavy series *Beasts Of Burden* while *not* being in competition with her husband Brian Azzarello

CH: Is it good to be back working on *Beasts Of Burden* with Evan Dorkin again?
JT: Yes, I just have been very slow. That's the only reason that *Beasts Of Burden* has not come out any sooner. He has had four stories written so I am working on the last two right now. Once again, great stories. These are sad stories and exciting stories which will make you cry.

CH: How does it feel, drawing someone else's script when you are yourself an accomplished writer?
JT: I always enjoy collaborating with people whose work I admire and I am really lucky to be able to do. I started out just drawing for other people so for me it's really natural and I am really lucky that I get to do it and people really like it.

I dunno, Pugs. I mean, she's creepy an' all...but the Orphan vouches for her. She told us all about the rat army, didn't she?
Pffft! For all we know, they're working together!

This page: *Beasts Of Burden*, which Jill Thompson has been drawing since 2003.

CH: Brian [Azzarello, Jill's husband] is also a writer. Is there ever any healthy competition between the two of yourselves?
JT: I think he's winning. No.

CH: Do you talk to each other about writing?
JT: Yes, all the time. We talk about story points and he comes to me and asks "What do you think about this?" or "How does this sound?" So I tell him my opinion and there have been times when I've said, "I've been trying to make this happen but I can't. I keep getting to the same plot point and I can't get any further. I don't know what to do." And because he comes to it from a completely different perspective or he hasn't been stressing over it all day long, he'll just say: "Oh, make this happen" and I go, "Oh of course."

CH: You have a long history with Vertigo. What are your thoughts on the current new slate of titles?
JT: I am not involved in that. I have a stack of things to read and I don't

get the chance to read anything else. The last time I was able to sit down and read a comic was *The Eternat*, an Argentinian comic. On Thanksgiving Day in the US I read half of that book and I haven't had a chance to read a comic since then! I have the best intentions. I think I should in the morning with my breakfast or coffee, make myself read a comic but I end up thinking: "Oh god what do I have to do today?" and I write down a big list of everything I have to accomplish. Sometimes I do err on the side of exercise vs reading where I think, "I am going to take this hour and go do my training because I am going to be sitting for the next 11 hours."

CH: Do you mainly read for research then?

JT: Research for projects yes. When I am not drawing, my life is taken up with other things that you have to do to live, like rake leaves and do the laundry.

CH: In the current industry, is it easier or harder to make a living as a comics professional?

JT: I hope it's gotten easier because it's the only thing I know how to do. I just recently bought digital stuff because I am going to try and learn how to draw digitally. As I get older and I need my glasses I realise that I need to know how to do that. Also there are times when I get commissioned for a cover and they will want four or five colour versions of it, or they like one and they want to see a different colour scheme and I have to keep redrawing and painting it just to send it in, whereas for someone else it may take them an hour to do that. It can take me all day so I think there are certain steps in art that I could benefit from doing digitally. The only way I know how to work very comfortably or well is with paper and watercolour, so I am trying to learn.

Above: The series has a team of intelligent animals investigating paranormal events in their neighbourhood.

> "I enjoy collaborating with people whose work I admire"

CH: What else are you working on at the moment?

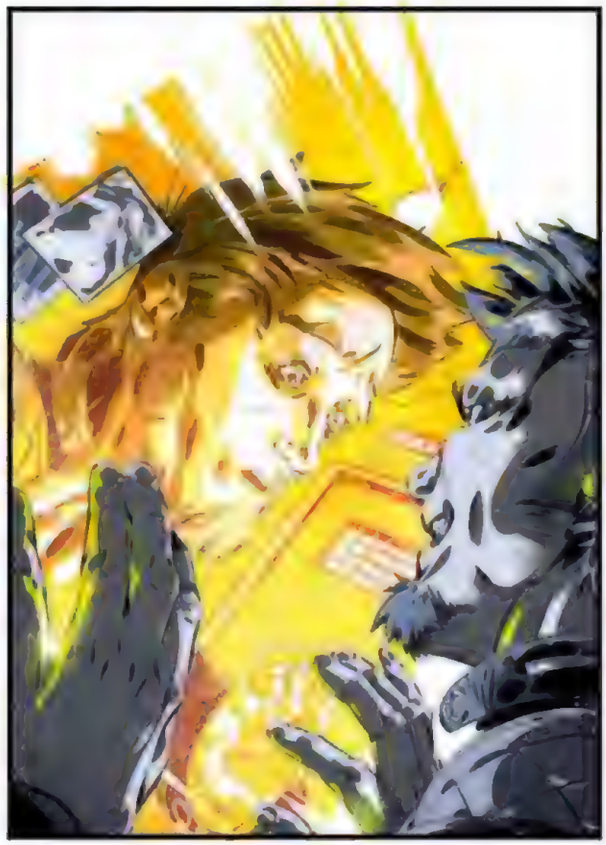
JT: I am working my way through about 500 hand-drawn Kickstarter rewards and I am working on some more *Scary Godmother*. There's no publishing dates for that because I am just going to get it out there at some point hopefully by the end of the year. Maybe it will come out digitally first and then print. But Kickstarter [for *Scary Godmother* dolls] takes precedence over everything else. It has been funded for nearly three years now. The manufacture is going as fast as it can. I can't make them go any faster than they actually go. We get to okay things when they are done with them and then we send back all of our changes and then they make them. Then they send them back and we make sure it matches up right and whether they have done it correctly. In the meantime I do all of my regular work in comics and go to conventions.

ANDI EWINGTON

The novelist and comics writer tells **Will Salmon** about his new video games influenced mini-series *Overrun*, described as "*Tron* meets *Dawn Of The Dead*"

CH: What was your initial starting point for *Overrun*?
AE: I had just come off the back of my debut novel *Forty-Five* and was scratching my head for the next "world-building" concept. Having spent nearly 40 years either playing or working on computer games, my thinking began to gravitate towards an idea set inside a computer. I love *Tron* but wanted a completely different vision for *Overrun*. I always envisaged a computer to be a bustling cosmopolitan city like New York or London. *The Matrix* was also a major influence on me. I enjoyed the realism of its computerised world, but I didn't want the "jacking in/out" aspect that really defined *The Matrix*. In *Overrun* I wanted the citizens to be unaware of anything outside of their own world, or if they were aware, then to question it much like a religion. This wasn't a story about a guy or girl jumping into the computer world, this was about the computer world.

Below: Covers to issues 4 and 1 respectively by Cosmo White & Kinet c Underground..



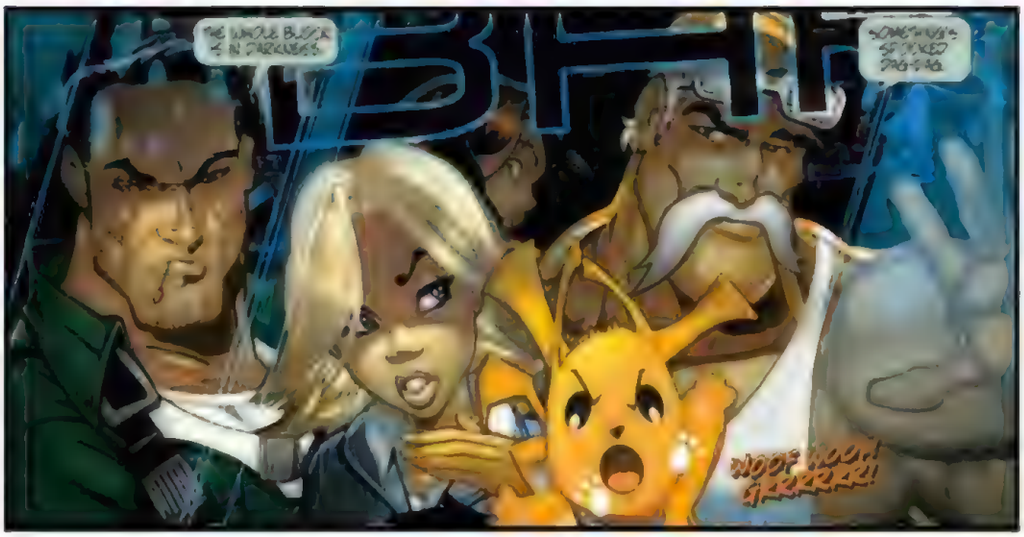
CH: How did you come up with the idea of people as computer files?
AE: I spend a lot of time on a train commuting to and from London, and one day, as I sat there probably delayed by signal failure for the umpteenth time, I began to imagine my fellow passengers as computer file types to pass the time. It was relatively easy to create groups – anyone carrying a backpack, for instance, was a document, others with headphones were music files, and so on. After a while, I realised that I had unintentionally created the inhabitants of *Overrun*. All I needed now was to come up with an enthralling story. [It] starts on a train journey into a computer city with all these file types sitting around, just as on my commute.

CH: How long have you been working on the project?
AE: I started batting the idea in my mind around late 2011. I tend to do a lot of stewing before I sit down to write anything, so it wasn't until mid 2012 that I actually managed to type a word. At first it was just

rough notes, but once I had fleshed it out I approached my co-writer Matt Woodley. I had always worked on the outside of the computer game industry, looking in, while Matt worked on the inside looking out. It made sense to have both perspectives for a project like this. We spent the next year writing and editing the script together, grabbing odd evenings or weekends for read-throughs. Once the script was 90% locked down, we started employing the likes of Paul Green, Cosmo White and Troy Peteri. We finally managed to put the final files to bed February 2016… That was a good feeling, I can tell you.

CH: You've been self-publishing the comic online. How did you find that experience? And why did you initially choose that over print?
AE: It's been a steep learning curve, but thankfully Matt's a dab hand at technical challenges. Now it's just a case of trying to persuade people to read *Overrun* on a digital device. Fortunately, we had people like Jeremy Burdock and Phill Buckland on hand to create some stunning trailers, which helped enormously in showing rather than telling. As for choosing a digital route first over print, we felt that digital was immediate and allowed us to test the water quickly without the fear of racking up a huge print cost. Once the first positive reviews started rolling in, we then hit the button on print. We were lucky to have people like Rob Pontefract at Forbidden Planet and Rich Emms of Limited Edition Comix supporting us. They really were key in helping get it on shelf. They are legends!

CH: How did you come to work with the artist, Paul Green?



AE: By chance, really. We originally had Cosmo White lined up, and he had begun designing the characters, when he was offered an amazing chance to work on *Thundercats*. Wishing him well, we turned our attention to finding a replacement. Fortunately, Harry Markos (of Markosia) put us in touch with Paul Green. He thought Paul's style might be what we were looking for. After a couple of test pages we quickly realised we had found our *Overrun* artist. As fate would have it, we managed to bring Cosmo back for the four covers.

CH: What qualities does Paul bring to the world of *Overrun*?
AE: Paul has a great understanding [both] of characterisation and of environmental detail. Combine that with his gorgeous colour work and you'll really appreciate how good he is. All of the characters have a high level of charisma and energy about them that just feels like they always belonged in the *Overrun* world. There are also some clever little game nods and touches Paul added that you'd only spot on a repeat read or two.

This page: Video game fans will enjoy many of the references and in-jokes in the story and the art by Paul Green.

CH: Both you and Matt worked in the video games industry. How did that experience affect the book?
AE: I think both Matt and I have an inherent understanding of cult references found within computer games. *Overrun* is peppered with iconic moments, items and characters that gamers can relate to on one level or another. We wanted to introduce these game references and weave them into the *Overrun* universe naturally, building them as subtle layers so they feel part of the world, rather than to serve as fan-bait. The whole story feels like it's ramping up, level after level, until the final climatic ending.

CH: Any plans for a second run?
AE: Certainly, but with everything it nearly always comes down to money. If we can get enough people to fall in love with the world then I hope to return to it with Matt. We have talked about the possibility of creating procedural mini-stories centred on Norton and McAfee, the two Home Security Detectives that protect the city from criminals. There's certainly more to come from the world of *Overrun*.

ALL IMAGES © EWINGTON/WOODLEY/GREEN/WHITE

WHEN MUTANTS

JEFF LEMIRE, CULLEN BUNN AND DENNIS HOPELESS TELL

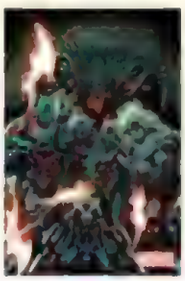
GOOD GO TO WAR

STEPHEN JEWELL ABOUT THE LATEST **X-MEN** CROSSOVER

While *X-Men: Apocalypse* is poised to explode into cinemas in May, the big screen isn't the only place where the immortal pharaoh-turned-supervillain is set to appear. Running concurrently in *Uncanny X-Men, Extraordinary X-Men*, and *All-New X-Men*, "The Apocalypse Wars" will see the Merry Mutants once again confronting their long-time enemy. But don't expect a conventional, multi-part crossover that requires you to purchase every single instalment: each book has a separate, standalone story that can be enjoyed on its own merits.

"We all had initial discussions, letting each other know what we were doing and where our stories were going," says Jeff Lemire, who kicked off proceedings in *Extraordinary X-Men*. "We've also talked about ways to make any possible connections, but I think we all wanted the freedom to be able to do our own thing and not have this disrupt the stories we were telling in each of our titles."

"We've talked a bit, but we didn't have to do too much to coordinate for this crossover, because the books really do not intersect," adds *Uncanny X-Men*'s Cullen Bunn, whose arc begins in April. "We're each telling our own Apocalypse-focused story, each with a unique spin on the mythos."



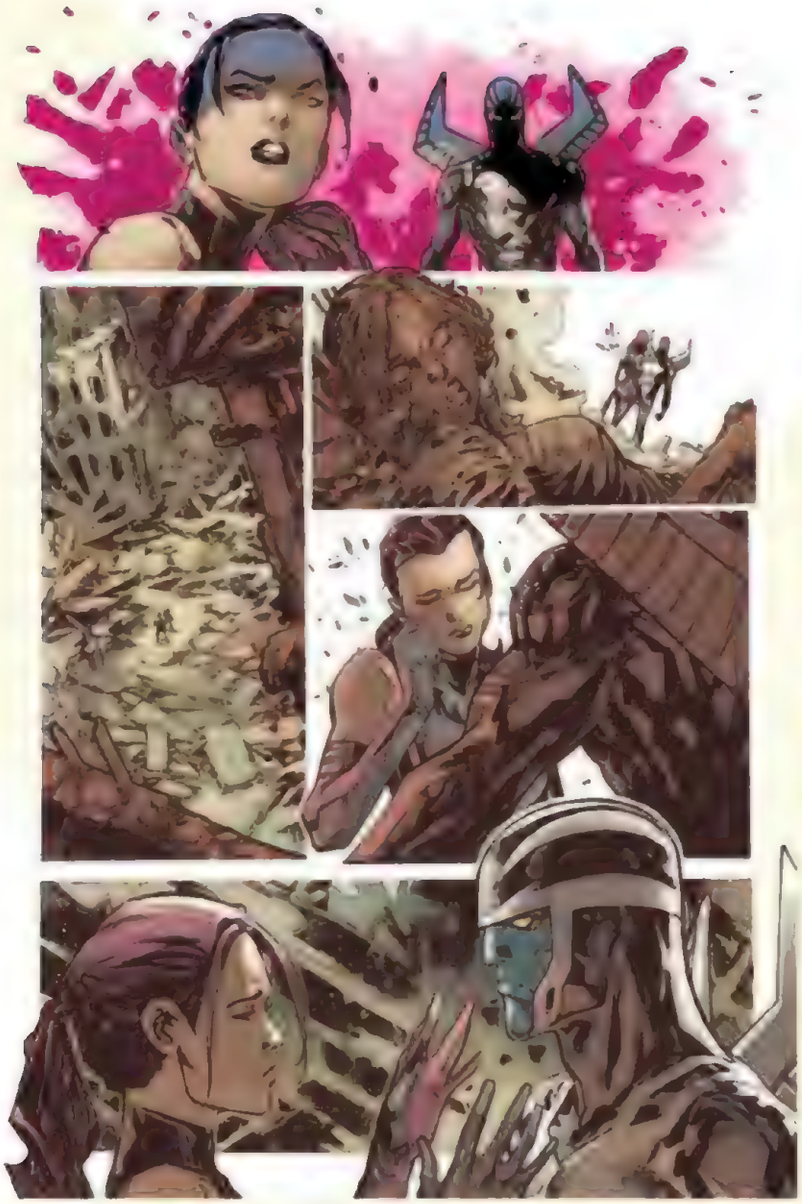
Above: It's mutant mayhem in these pages from *Extraordinary X-Men #8*

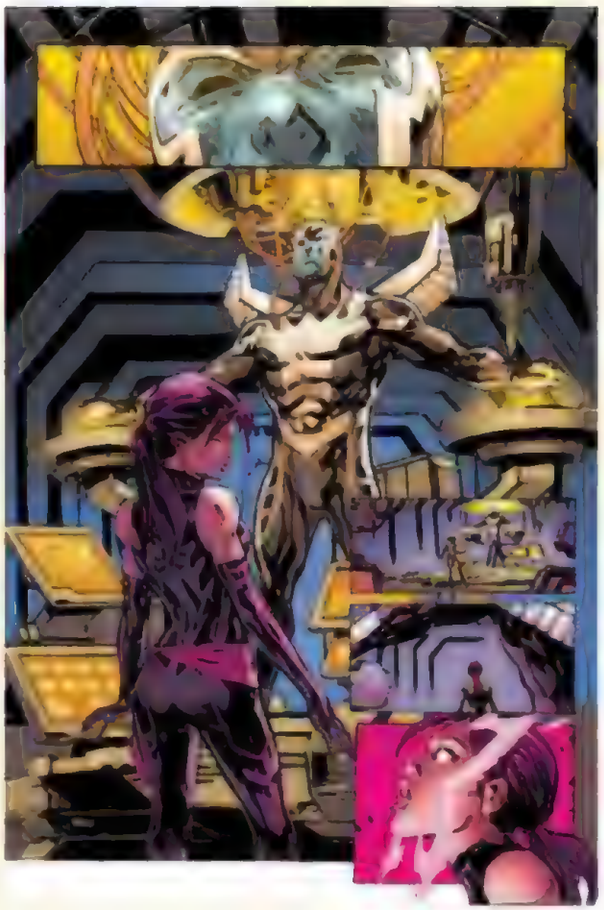
Inset: Apocalypse-themed variant cover for *Guardians of the Galaxy #8* by Dale Keown

"We discussed our basic plan a few months ago and have kept each other in the loop all along," continues Dennis Hopeless, who delves into "The Apocalypse Wars" with *All-New X-Men* in May. "The stories don't directly affect one another all that much. Mostly we just work to keep the Apocalyptic elements straight and heading in the same direction."

APOCALYPTIC ORIGINS

Ranking 24th in a survey of the greatest supervillains of all time, Apocalypse debuted in *X-Factor #5* in 1986. He was originally created by writer Louise Simonson and artist Jackson Guice at the behest of editor Bob Harras, who wanted to introduce a new heavyweight





"THE CHARACTER DESIGN IS SO ICONIC, POWERFUL AND CREEPY"

villain for the fledgling team, which would give them "a reason to exist." However, it was the interpretation of Walt Simonson, who contributed some sketches of the character before becoming the regular penciller on the series with *X-Factor #10*, that really appealed to the young Jeff Lemire.

"My biggest memory is all the amazing covers Walt Simonson did for *X-Factor*," Lemire recalls. "Being an artist myself, I grew up drawn first to the artwork, and Walt Simonson is a master. The strength of the character, for me, started in the incredible character design, which is so iconic and really powerful and creepy."

"Oh man!" adds Bunn. "I remember when *X-Factor* first launched. I rushed to the comic shop to grab the first issue. I loved it, and I was reading every issue when it first came out. So I certainly remember Apocalypse's first appearances. Even more, the fall of Angel in the 'Mutant Massacre' and his subsequent reappearance as Archangel absolutely stunned me as a reader."

Rather than the comic books, it was *X-Men: The Animated Series* that provided Hopeless with his initial introduction to Apocalypse's sinister ways in the 1990s. "I was a huge fan of that growing up, and he was one of my favourite villains right off the bat," he says. "This big blue steroid Hitler succeeded where all the other megalomaniac cartoon villains had failed. And we actually got to see the Apocalypse-run world, which was terrifying."

Top: Both Archangel and Psylocke are prominent in the *Uncanny* storyline

Inset: 23 Marvel series will get variant covers depicting their stars as either Horsemen or citizens of the "Age of Apocalypse" timeline.

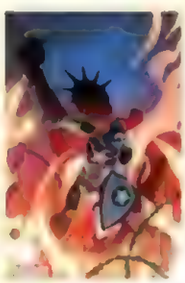
The three titles start their respective storylines in turn over a three-month period, but readers do not need to begin "The Apocalypse Wars" with March's *Extraordinary X-Men #8*, as Lemire explains: "We're all telling really different stories and each is just as important to our respective teams and our series, so I don't really see it as me taking the lead."

In the same way, Hopeless says readers won't need to have read the other titles' instalments of "The Apocalypse Wars" before *All-New X-Men*'s in May: "Our story is a

completely separate thing that grows organically out of our previous arc," he explains. "Events in the other two series may well have repercussions for the *All-New X-Men* further down the road, but for right now these are just parallel stories, and that definitely gives us a lot of freedom."

EXTRAORDINARY X-TEAM

For his part, Bunn also emphasises that the story arc fits within the ethos of his own book. "Dennis, Jeff and I have done a pretty good job of making sure each of our books has a different feel, and with mine, you have a different kind of X-team, one made up of hard cases, anti-heroes and villains," says Bunn, whose Magneto-led roster also includes Mystique, Psylocke, Sabretooth and Fantomex. "It still has a very classic X-sensibility – or at least, that's kind of what I'm going for. They're not actually a black op team, although they may appear that way at first glance, especially in the first few issues. I think the differences are pretty important, and by the end of the fifth issue – and definitely the sixth – you'll see that this team is in no way trying to be covert. In fact, it's quite the opposite, although the team will be functioning in 'The Apocalypse Wars' arc in the same way that they did in the first arc."



Above Some of Humberto Ramos' gorgeous pencils for *Extraordinary X-Men* #8.

Right: Pasqual Ferry and Frank D'Armatal's Age of Apocalypse variant cover for *All-New X-Men* #9

While Lemire notes that "Magik may be a bit busy with other things," the *Extraordinary X-Men* line-up will also be relatively unchanged. "The team will indeed be the same but not all of them will face the Apocalypse threat," he says. "The young mutants Colossus has been training will play a big role, as will Storm, Nightcrawler, Iceman, Logan and Jean."

With the Terrigen Mist continuing to represent a grave threat to mutantkind's existence and tension between the X-Men and the Inhumans continuing to rise, the Children of the Atom's apparent last hope is propelled into the time stream, where it falls into Apocalypse's nefarious hands.

ALL IMAGES © MARVEL

Acknowledging that "we will see the Horsemen," Lemire declines to reveal the exact identity of the latest incarnation of Apocalypse's genetically altered henchmen and women. "I'm not really taking any major cues or specific story elements from past Apocalypse stories," he says. "We really wanted to try and do our own thing."

As for *Uncanny X-Men*, the Horsemen will not be making an appearance there, although Bunn is promising to feature some other Apocalypse-related villains. "I had plans for introducing a new batch of Horsemen in this arc, but their inclusion ended up taking away from where the story was headed," he explains. "Don't worry, though, some familiar villains will be showing their ugly faces, and that's not just a figure of speech – there are some ugly villains who are going to be showing up!"

Transformed by Apocalypse from the original X-Men's more easy-going Angel into the blue-skinned, genetically enhanced Archangel, Warren Worthington III plays a significant role. "He's the key, but in many ways this may be Psylocke's story even more, as her connection to Archangel is crucial here," teases Bunn, referring to one-time *Captain Britain* foil Betsy Braddock, whose past relationship with Archangel was a part of Scott Lobdell's 1990s *X-Men* run. "Fantomex is also pretty important, and at the same time, there's a kind of B-story unfolding that is very Monet-centric."

Affectionately known as Kid Apocalypse or just plain old Genesis, Apocalypse's teenage clone and *All-New X-Men* member ›

WHO IS APOCALYPSE?

A POTTED HISTORY OF THE "FIRST MUTANT"

If Bob Layton's original plans had come to pass, the next X-Men movie might have been very different. As writer on new X-Men spin-off *X-Factor* – launched in 1986 as a fresh vehicle for the five original X-team members – Layton initially intended Daredevil villain The Owl to turn out to be the shadowy brains behind The Alliance Of Evil, a sinister cabal that the team faced in the first few issues of the new series.

But X-book group editor Bob Harras insisted that the team needed a new heavyweight adversary who would "up the stakes" and provide X-Factor with "a reason to exist". New writer Louise Simonson and artist Butch Guice introduced Apocalypse, who ominously appeared on the last page of *X-Factor #5* before making his full debut in #6.

Apocalypse quickly proved a fan favourite. Having enhanced his own molecular-based mutant abilities with alien Celestial technology, he established himself as one of the X-Men's most formidable opponents. *X-Factor #15* introduced his henchmen The Four Horsemen Of Apocalypse, a quartet of brainwashed mutants whose powers he has nefariously altered. They headlined in issue 19.

In 1993, in *Cable #6–8*, writer Fabian Nicieza established the character's connection to Ancient Egypt and revealed that his real name is En Sabah Nur, which according to Marvel translates as "The First One" (but is closer to "The Morning Light" in Arabic). 1995 crossover *Age of Apocalypse*, set in a grim future timeline ruled over by Apocalypse, really cemented his popularity, leading to 1996's *Rise of Apocalypse*. Written by Terry Kavanagh and drawn by Adam Pollina, the four-issue mini-series told his origin story, establishing that his birth 5,000 years ago as the first human born with the all-important X-gene marked him out as the first mutant.

Since then, Apocalypse has become a regular in the Marvel Universe and was a constant presence in Rick Remender's Dark Angel Saga, which in *Uncanny X-Force #7* saw the introduction of his son Evan Sabanur, aka Genesis or Kid Apocalypse.

Left: *All-New X-Men #9* cover by Mark Bagley and Nolan Woodard

Above: *Uncanny X-Men #6* cover by Greg Land and Nolan Woodard

Evan Sabahnur – aka En Sabah Nur – is the focus of Hopeless's storyline. "He and Beast are the primary protagonists, as Hank's reaction to Apocalypse – and the realities of Evan's destiny – are a major part of the plot, which will propel the character in interesting directions going forward," he says.

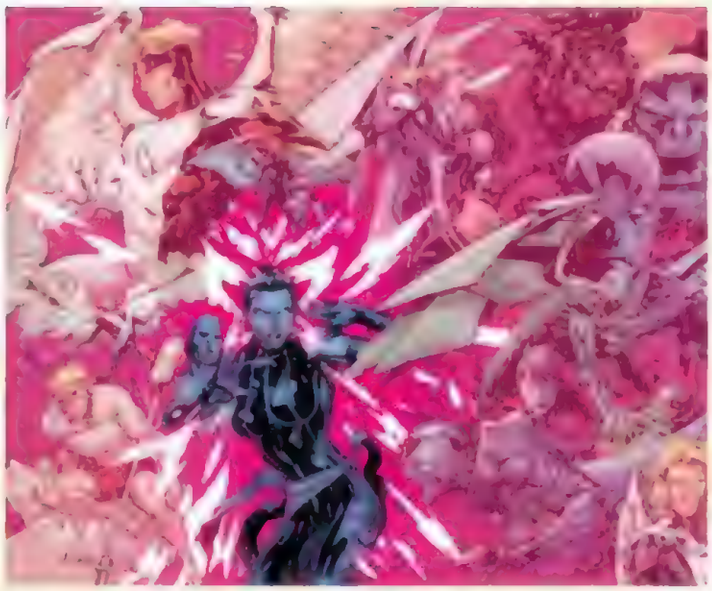
The Hank McCoy in *All-New X-Men* is of course younger and non-furry. Hopeless explains: "Our Hank is a brilliant young man who was yanked into the future and now feels intellectually overwhelmed for the first time in his life. Consequently, there are problems here that he can't quite wrap his head around, and his solutions are sometimes embarrassingly antiquated. It bothers him to feel behind like that, so starting in 'The Apocalypse Wars,' you'll see Beast begin to try and catch up. So the journey they take will have major repercussions for both Hank and Evan, as they make choices and discoveries that will impact everything that comes after."

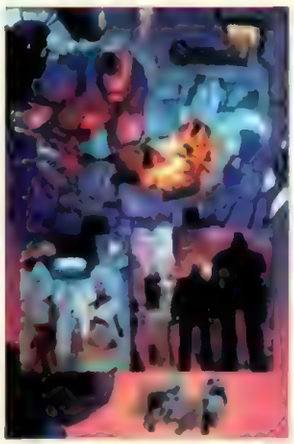
With Evan's development having been a large part of Rick Remender's monumental *Uncanny X-Force* run, Hopeless confirms that he will be harking back to his early days. "We'll definitely be mining his history and destiny," he says, revealing that Evan will once again confront the formidable scavengers, the Sandstormers. "Fans of the '90s X-Men might remember these red-cloaked bad-asses from way back in En Sabah Nur's past. They're basically like ancient Egyptian Dothraki, and are not be messed with!"

> **"IT WILL HAVE MAJOR REPERCUSSIONS FOR BOTH HANK AND EVAN"**

UNCANNY TEAM-UPS

Hopeless has welcomed the opportunity to work with veteran artist Mark Bagley, best known for his decade-long run on *Ultimate Spider-Man* with erstwhile *All-New X-Men* scribe Brian Michael Bendis. "I've yet to find anything that Mark can't draw," he says. "His Apocalypse is fantastic – just like everything else he does. I think everyone knows that Bagley can draw big crazy superhero action,



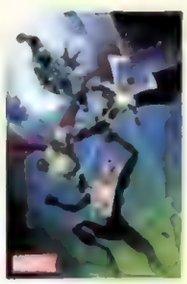


as his art has so much bombastic energy, but he can also really dig into the quiet character moments and pull the emotion out. This book gives him the opportunity to do both, and 'The Apocalypse Wars' is no exception."

Having been paired with Greg Land on his first *Uncanny X-Men* arc, Bunn is now teaming up with Ken Lashley, who apart from pencilling numerous issues of *Superman* has previously turned his hand to numerous X-titles, including *Excalibur* and *Cable*. "Ken is a delight to work with, and every page he turns in blows me away," says Bunn. "There's a double-page spread early on in issue six, and if those pages don't amaze you, you must be more soulless than Archangel is right now! With those pages, Ken set the tone for the entire arc."

Although Victor Ibanez took on the art chores for *Extraordinary X-Men*'s second arc, the artist of the first, Humberto Ramos, has reunited with Lemire for "The Apocalypse Wars," and according to the writer is now really in his element. "Humberto gets to go a bit wild with this one, as there's lots of different environments and characters to draw and lots of new things to design," says Lemire. "There's a fair amount of world-building with this arc, and he's doing exceptional work, as are our inker Victor Olazabo and colourist Edgar Delgado. They're a tremendous team of collaborators!"

While its publication is timed to coincide with *X-Men: Apocalypse*,



Above left: Cover art by Humberto Ramos and Edgar Delgado for *Extraordinary X-Men #8*

Inset: The Apocalypse-themed variant cover for *All-New, All-Different Avengers #9* by Khoi Pham. Collect them all!

"The Apocalypse Wars" stands entirely apart from Bryan Singer's big screen opus, and neither Lemire, Bunn nor Hopeless have any inside information about what to expect from the movie. "Like seemingly everyone else in the world, I'm an Oscar Isaac fan, so I'm looking forward to seeing what he does with Apocalypse," says Lemire, referring to the actor, known for *Star Wars: The Force Awakens* and *Ex Machina*, who takes on the title role. "But I have no other knowledge of the film, beyond the trailers that are currently online, so I'm obviously not taking any cues from it for my story."

"I'm excited to see the movie," contributes Bunn. "Some of the recent previews have been pretty exciting, especially the one with Psylocke slicing the car in half! That said, I don't really know much about where the movie is headed, and since I actively avoid spoilers and have only seen a couple of the previews, I probably know less about it than the average movie buff."

"I'm super-excited to see the movie as well," adds Hopeless in conclusion. "But I also try to avoid pre-release spoilers and never watch trailers, so any similarities would be purely coincidental."

X-CEPTIONAL!

THE 20 GREATEST X-MEN STORIES

THEY'RE ONE OF THE CORNERSTONES OF THE MARVEL UNIVERSE, BUT WHICH X-MEN STORIES ARE THE ALL-TIME BEST? **CARL ANKA** STARTS THE FIGHT

For over 50 years the X-Men have charmed, dazzled and shocked comic readers, thanks to their heady mix of blockbuster action and soap opera melodrama.

Their distinguished history is crammed with classic stories, and we thought it would be fun to pick out our top 20 all-time best. How wrong we were. The rich work of Chris Claremont merits its own list alone, so how would we possibly also acknowledge the best of Joss Whedon, Grant Morrison, Mark Millar and more? How much Wolverine should we incorporate? Should a story arc get brownie points because it served as the basis for a film adaptation?

See? Distilling the 20 best X-Men stories is a fool's errand. But luckily we are nothing but fools. Tin hats at the ready, we're going in...

20

NATURAL RESOURCES

ISSUES: ULTIMATE COMICS: X-MEN #24–28 (2013)
WRITER(S): BRIAN WOOD
ARTIST(S): MAHMUD A ASRAR

Following the events of "Ultimatum", the mutants of Earth-1601 struggled to find a place, but in "Natural Resources" Brian Wood squeezed out some final highlights for the gang. With Kitty Pryde using guerilla warfare tactics to deal with threats to a largely teenage mutant population, Wood's arc was a compelling send-off for *Ultimate X-Men*.

19

RETURN OF THE KING

ISSUES: ULTIMATE X MEN #26–33 (2003)
WRITER(S): MARK MILLAR
ARTIST(S): ADAM KUBERT, DAVID FINCH

Mark Millar really had a thing for Magneto. Closing out his run on *Ultimate X Men*, Mark Millar's tale told us in no uncertain terms that Magneto was far from the cuddly figure that Sir Ian McKellen portrayed in the movies. While it adhered to the familiar pattern of "The X Men vs. The Brotherhood", the "Return of the King" arc stands out thanks to Erik Lensherr's seriously unhinged behaviour.

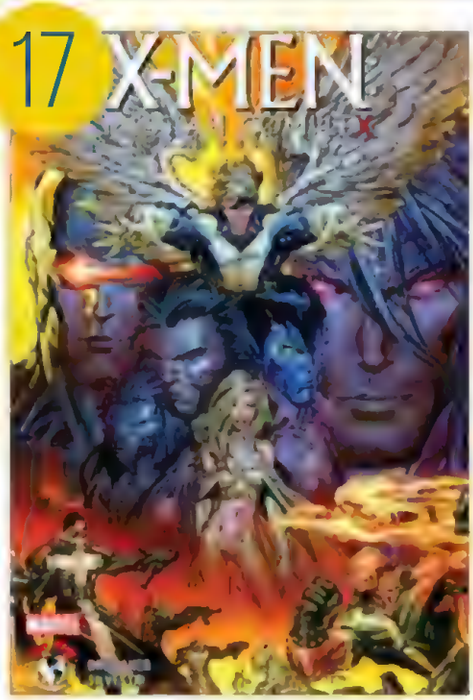
18

YESTERDAY'S X MEN

ISSUES: ALL-NEW X-MEN VOL. 1 #1–5 (2013)
WRITER(S): BRIAN MICHAEL BENDIS
ARTIST(S): STUART IMMONEN

The most recent publication on our list and maybe the most divisive. Bendis' X-Men writing has sometimes seen a return to the dense, continuity-heavy, newbie-confusing X-Men stories that saw sales slump near the end of last decade, but having the "Original Five" X-Men brought in to face their modern, jaded and cynical counterparts was an inspired move. Add to that heapings of Bendis' trademark witty team banter and sci-fi riffing, and this makes for a great late entry on our list.

17



THE MESSIAH TRILOGY (MESSIAH COMPLEX, MESSIAH WAR & SECOND COMING)

ISSUES: VARIOUS BOOKS (2008–10)
WRITER(S): VARIOUS
ARTIST(S): VARIOUS

Out of "No More Mutants" and the reduction of the mutant population came Hope, the first mutant to be born after the events of "House of M", and "The Messiah Trilogy" turned the X-Universe into a three-part blockbuster chase for the supposed chosen one. In a dense, two-year epic that would act as a changing of the guard for the entire X-Universe, it was within "The Messiah Trilogy" that student became master, villain became hero, and mutantkind slowly got back on its feet.

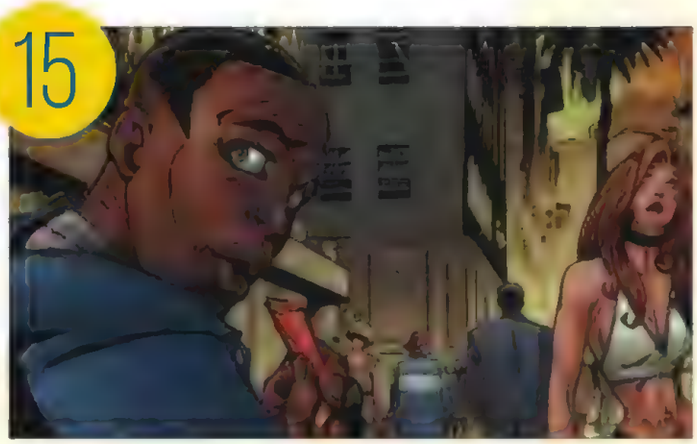
16

RIOT AT XAVIER'S

ISSUES: NEW X-MEN VOL. 1 #135–138 (2001)
WRITER(S): GRANT MORRISON
ARTIST(S): FRANK QUITELY

School rebellion at the Academy? Such a simple idea was made great thanks to the creative team of Grant Morrison and Frank Quitely. New original character Quentin Quire kicked up a drug-fuelled psychic storm on school grounds in this three-part arc that plugged in well to Morrison's updating of the X-Men. "Magneto was right!" cried the Omega Gang, and big questions about Xavier's leadership were asked.

15

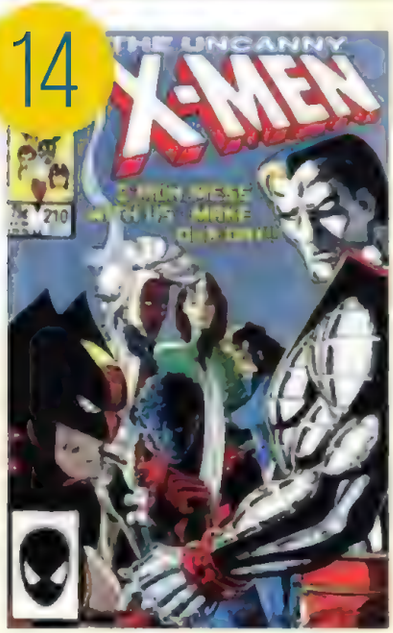


THE TOMORROW PEOPLE

ISSUES: ULTIMATE X-MEN #1–6 (2000)
WRITER(S): MARK MILLAR
ARTIST(S): ADAM KUBERT, ANDY KUBERT

A lean, mean and shocking reinvention of the X-Men for the Ultimate Universe, Mark Millar's opening six-part arc dazzled when it arrived in 2000. Wolverine was working with Magneto and bedded Jean Grey (and sported terrible facial hair to boot). Magneto beat and embarrassed the American President on the lawn of the White House before promising to commit genocide. X-Men tales have always lent themselves well to parallel world reimagining, and "The Tomorrow People" stands up there with some of the best.

14



MUTANT MASSACRE

ISSUES: UNCANNY X-MEN #210–214, X-FACTOR VOL. 1 #9–11, NEW MUTANTS VOL. 1 #46, THOR VOL. 1 #373–374, POWER PACK #27, DAREDEVIL VOL. 1 #238 (1986)
WRITER(S): CHRIS CLAREMONT, LOUISE SIMONSON, WALTER SIMONSON
ARTIST(S): JOHN ROMITA JR., WALTER SIMONSON, SAL BUSCEMA

The X Men are beaten, battered and bruised like never before. When Sinister sends his Marauder Squad to eliminate the Morlocks, you expect our heroes to do the right thing and save the day. Not here. Hundreds of Morlocks are killed. Various X-Men are severely wounded, and not even the arrival of Thor and Daredevil can stem the losses. Angel is crucified and goes on to lose his wings from the event, setting things up for his turn to the dark side. Rarely have our heroes failed so utterly and completely. Bleak and utterly compelling in equal measure.

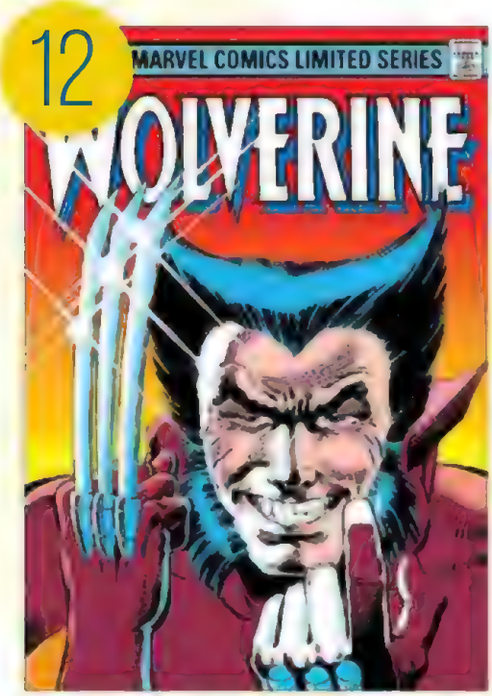
13

DANGEROUS

ISSUES: ASTONISHING X-MEN VOL. 3 #7–12 (2005)
WRITER(S): JOSS WHEDON
ARTIST(S): JOHN CASSADAY

Much of early 2000s X-Men found fertile ground in one of three story threads: the slow reveal of Xavier as a flawed mutant leader, the gradual growth and maturation of Cyclops as his successor, and the rapid ascent of Kitty Pryde as someone who got things done. "Dangerous" combined all three in a Joss Whedon penned triumph. The concept of a sentient Danger Room out for revenge against Charles could have turned into a mildly interesting one-shot, but with Cassaday's smooth art illustrating all the devastation, "Dangerous" saw the X-Men memorably face off against their very own Ultron-style threat.

12



WOLVERINE

ISSUES: WOLVERINE VOL. 1 #1–4 (1982)
WRITER(S): CHRIS CLAREMONT
ARTIST(S): FRANK MILLER

Oh, go on then, let's have one standalone Wolverine story. While Logan would eventually go on to become a sometimes suffocating presence on both X-team and Avengers books (and films, and cartoons, and games, and… you get the point), when this four-part story debuted back in 1982 there was none of that Wolverine fatigue. This was new. This was fresh. This was an exciting look at the comic book's breakout star of the decade. This is where we learnt just why Wolverine was the best there is at what he does.

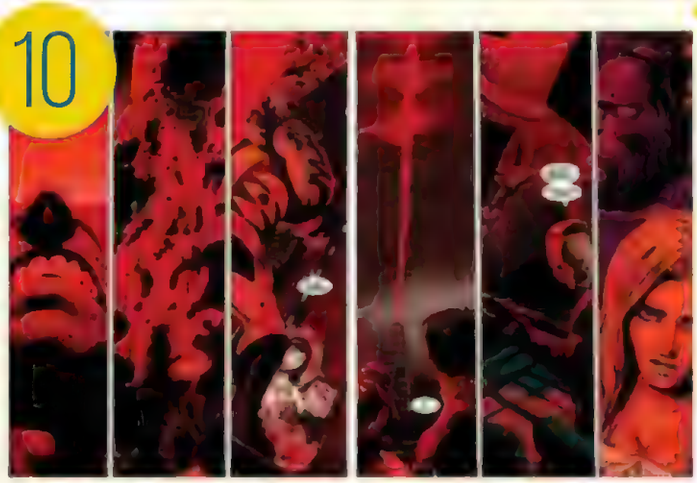
11

X-AMINATIONS I & II

ISSUES: X-FACTOR VOL. 1 #87, X-FACTOR VOL. 3 #13 (1993 & 2006)
WRITER(S): PETER DAVID
ARTIST(S): JOE QUESADA, PABLO RAIMONDI

Sometimes the best X-Men stories can be found in clever one-shots. "X-Aminations" saw Doc Samson attempt to study some of the various members of X-Factor, and the findings were both hilarious and tragic. You won't be able to look at Quicksilver the same way ever again after reading.

10



UNSTOPPABLE

ISSUES: ASTONISHING X-MEN VOL. 3 # 19–24 (2006)
WRITER(S): JOSS WHEDON
ARTIST(S): JOHN CASSADAY

A giant bullet coming from space to eliminate all life on Earth. From silly beginnings comes one of the stand-out story arcs in Whedon's *Astonishing X-Men* run. Full of wit, action and intergalactic adventure, "Unstoppable" saw the X-Men on top of their game, saving the planet from a threat only they can deal with. And with due respect to Chris Claremont, "Unstoppable" boasts some of the best moments in Cyclops' history. His "To me, my X-Men" rallying call is one of his crowning moments.

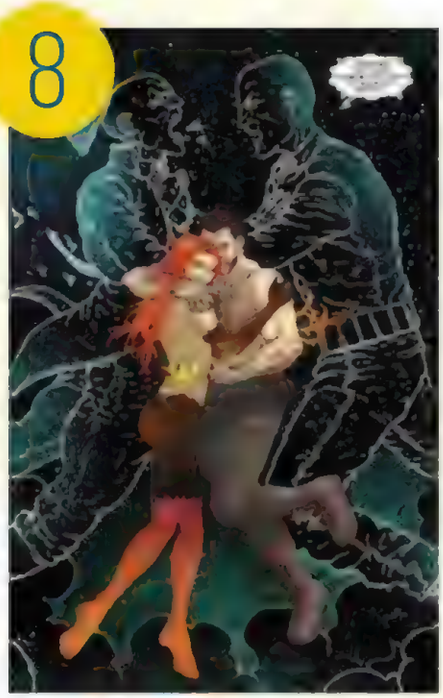
9

DAYS OF FUTURE PAST

ISSUES: UNCANNY X-MEN VOL. 1 #141–142 (1980)
WRITER(S): CHRIS CLAREMONT, JOHN BYRNE
ARTIST(S): JOHN BYRNE

In the final collaboration of Chris Claremont and artist John Byrne, the pair closed an era with a doozy of story in "Days Of Future Past". Sending an older Kitty Pryde back in time from a dystopian future when mutants are hunted mercilessly (sound familiar?) to prevent an assassination, "Days Of Future Past" saw both creators firing on all cylinders. Closely adapted by the lovely '90s cartoon and somewhat loosely adapted in the so-so Bryan Singer film (although frustratingly, Kitty's starring role was substituted in both), "Days Of Future Past" is a banner X-Men story, one of the first "out there" comic books you introduce to friends and a mind-bending adventure all rolled into one.

8

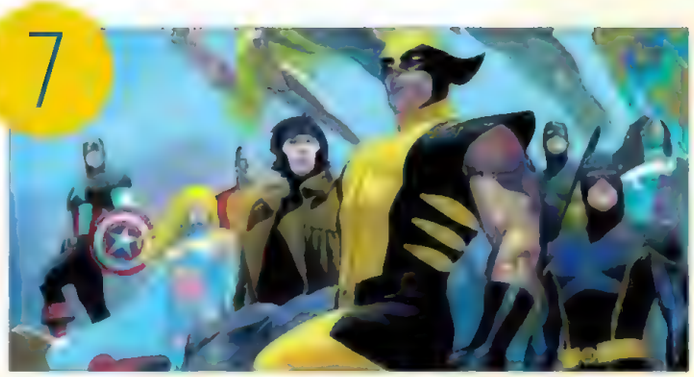


E IS FOR EXTINCTION

ISSUES: NEW X-MEN #114–116 (2001)
WRITER(S): GRANT MORRISON
ARTIST(S): FRANK QUITELY

Blowing away the cobwebs from the convoluted X-Men crossovers of the '90s, Grant Morrison's opening story on X-Men smartly updated the franchise just in time for people entering a comic book store for the first time. This was X-Men for a new millennium, ditching the spandex costumes and formulaic battles with the Brotherhood for sleek leather outfits and deeper philosophical ponderings… along with battles with Sentinels. The introduction of deadly new villain Cassandra Nova would complete the update. The New X-Men were here, and were riveting to read.

7



HOUSE OF M

ISSUES: HOUSE OF M #1–8 (2005)
WRITER(S): BRIAN MICHAEL BENDIS
ARTIST(S): OLIVIER COIPEL

It's another all-encompassing X-Men crossover, but what makes "House Of M" stand out is its slightly more utopian alternative reality. With Magneto now leader of the mutant race and Homo Superior the leading global force, the planet was… better? Or at least better than the usual dystopian hellscapes the X-Men typically took us to. Like many of Magneto's wishes, it wasn't to last, and with a small utterance from Scarlet Witch, the X-Universe would be shaped for close to a decade. "House Of M" was Bendis' best work with the X-Men and a rare Marvel crossover that delivered on its promise of changing the status quo. Bonus points for the excellent Spider-Man tie-in too.

6

GIFTED

ISSUES: ASTONISHING X-MEN VOL. 3 #1–6 (2004)
WRITER(S): JOSS WHEDON
ARTIST(S): JOHN CASSADAY

Fans expected big things when Joss Whedon was brought in to pen the new continuity-light *Astonishing X-Men* book, but no one quite anticipated just how good the *Buffy* scribe would be in charge. Channelling and improving the Claremont formula, Whedon's X-Men debut might go down as the best opening arc by any comic book writer. Ever. Not to mention the greatest single panel love story of all time between Colossus and Kitty.

5

AGE OF APOCALYPSE

ISSUES: X-MEN: ALPHA X-MAN #1–4, X-CALIBRE #1–4, GENERATION NEXT #1–4, ASTONISHING X-MEN #1–4, WEAPON X #1–4, FACTOR X #1–4, GAMBIT & THE X-TERNALS #1–4, AMAZING X-MEN #1–4, X-MEN CHRONICLES #1–2, X-UNIVERSE #1–2, X-MEN: OMEGA, AND A SLEW OF ONE-SHOTS AND SIDE STORIES (1995–1996)
WRITER(S): VARIOUS
ARTIST(S): VARIOUS

Replacing every regular published X-book for four months, "Age Of Apocalypse" is a rare moment in '90s superhero storytelling where its excesses came good. It was big, brash and gritty, and everyone was a bit of an arsehole. Looking back, what strikes you about it is how avant garde the project was. In substituting the regular Earth 616 for this Apocalypse-ruled hellscape, X-Men writers of the time let fly, giving us so many weird and wild ideas that it bordered on fan service. Magneto was leader of the X-Men. Jean Grey and Wolverine were secret agents and lovers. Finally it was okay to hate Cyclops because in this universe he was a villain raised by Sinister. While it may have been a pig's ear to read through and collect, seeing all of your Marvel favourites flipped into weird alternative-reality versions made for thrilling reading.

4

MAGNETO TESTAMENT

ISSUES: X-MEN: MAGNETO – TESTAMENT #1–5 (2008)
WRITER(S): GREG PAK
ARTIST(S): CARMINE DI GIANDOMENICO

If *Maus* has a superhero comic equivalent, then it is surely Greg Pak's tale of young Max Eisenhardt dealing with the brutalities of Nazi Germany. Magneto being a Holocaust survivor is one of the few Marvel origin stories that remains tied to real-world events, and in the heartbreaking "Magneto Testament" you get a small glimpse into the hardships that colour the complex villain. A devastating and vital tale, one that wouldn't look out of place on a school curriculum.

3

GOD LOVES, MAN KILLS

ISSUES: MARVEL GRAPHIC NOVEL #5: X-MEN: GOD LOVES, MAN KILLS (1982)
WRITER(S): CHRIS CLAREMONT
ARTIST(S): BRENT ANDERSON

For all the posturing about mutants being a parable for the oppressions faced by real-world minorities, X-Men stories all too often devolve into tales of "punching makes things better". Not this one. It's now famous for feeding into the plot of the second *X-Men* movie, but still stands up superbly as a story in its own right. When villain William Stryker points to a battered Nightcrawler and shouts "You Dare Call That Thing Human?!", readers wince, as Claremont's allegorical graphic novel makes all too clear the fraught intolerances that have shaped human history. Stryker is such a threat to mutants that it takes the combined efforts of the X-Men and Magneto's Brotherhood to defeat him; but the preacher possess no power himself, instead preying on people's intolerance to further his own deranged goals. One of the most dangerous threats mutants have ever faced is the type of person who easily exists in our world today. *God Loves, Man Kills* is a power polemic against bigotry masquerading as a superhero story.

2

APOCALYPSE SOLUTION & DARK ANGEL SAGA

ISSUES: UNCANNY X FORCE VOL. 3 #1–17 (2012)
WRITER(S): RICK REMENDER
ARTIST(S): JEROME OPEÑA

The are two kinds of conflict in superhero stories. The first is all about good vs. evil, channelling adventure, acts of bravery, and quick wit to build a fun tale. The second is all about conflict itself, using spandex-clad heroes to ask big questions about why we're constantly drawn to fighting and what it does to a person. Rick Remender's run of *Uncanny X-Force* is one of the greatest narratives of the second kind, taking some of the most violent and damaged Marvel heroes and putting them through the wringer for 35 issues. The stand-out arc, the two-part "Apocalypse Solution" and "Dark Angel Saga," is a 17-part epic juggling love triangles, dimension-hopping, moral pondering and some of the best fight scenes in a Marvel book. Psylocke and Angel have never been better written. Deadpool is rarely more personable. The story's ending is one of the most poignant finales in comic book history. A must-read for all comic book fans

1

THE DARK PHOENIX SAGA

ISSUES: UNCANNY X-MEN VOL. 1 #129–138 (1980)
WRITER(S): CHRIS CLAREMONT
ARTIST(S): JOHN BYRNE

It always had to be this story, the quintessential story from the quintessential X-Men writer. The iconic cover with an unhinged Jean Grey crushing the X-Men logo with a scattered team of heroes at her feet. "The Dark Phoenix Saga" is everything comic book readers love about X-Men condensed into one tale. We say condensed, but on rereading, Claremont's tale comes with the convoluted storytelling that plagued a lot of superhero tales of the times. It's not perfect, but it is genre-defining. The X-Men universe has been forever shaped by it, and writers have repeated riffed on it, remixed it and tried to top it (often coming nowhere near close – one reason why *X-Men 3* hurt so much was because of its bastardisation of the much-loved story). There is at least one piece of everything you like about X-Men in "The Dark Phoenix Saga" – action, romance, humour, melodrama and a small story that ended up stretching across galaxies to boot. A true classic. The original and the best.

THEY MIGHT BE GIANTS

THE CHILLING ATTACK ON TITAN IS A GLOBAL PHENOMENON. STEPHEN KELLY PLUNGES IN...

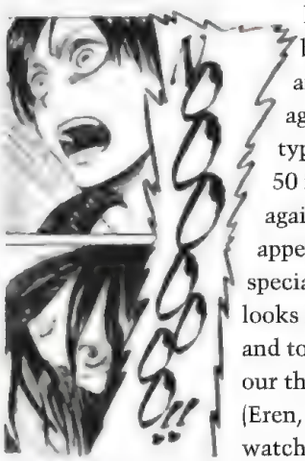
FACING PAGE: The cover of Volume One captures the titanic scale of the threat facing humanity

ABOVE: The art doesn't hold back. And you thought zombies were terrifying!

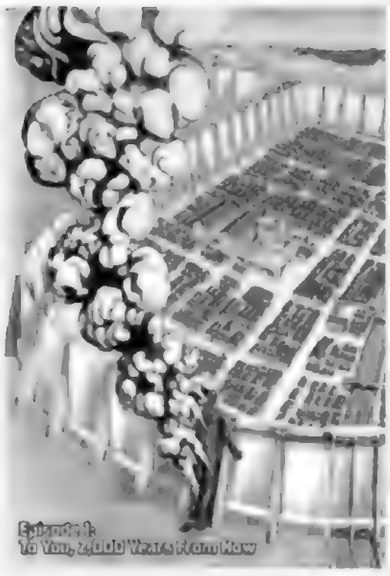
There's a point early in *Attack On Titan*, the wildly successful manga series from Japan, where a child watches his mother being eaten alive. It happens just after his city is breached by "titans" – grotesque, man-eating giants who bumble around, naked, like toddlers, mindlessly devouring anyone they can. His mother, trapped beneath some rubble, is helpless as it approaches, a huge, deformed freak, with a face forever fixed in a rictus grin. It doesn't stop smiling when it picks her up off the ground. It doesn't stop smiling when it dangles her, like a mouse, into its mouth. And it doesn't stop smiling when it chomps her in two.

As of July 2015, *Attack On Titan* was confirmed to have 2.5 million copies in print – spread over 15 volumes – in the English language, plus nearly 45 million in Japanese. For context, *Star Wars #1* – backed by all the hype in the world – shipped over one million copies last year, the first direct market series to do so since 1993. It simply doesn't get the same amount of coverage in the West, but *Attack On Titan* is a stone cold phenomenon, a series with huge global appeal thanks to scenes like the one we've described – as horrifying as any zombie movie, with literally larger threats and younger protagonists.

Created by Hajime Isayama, the series is set in a future where, a century after the mysterious arrival of the titans, humanity has been pushed to the brink of extinction. Desperate, humans have retreated into medieval-looking cities protected by huge, 164-foot walls – ample to protect them against the titans, who typically range from 10 to 50 feet tall, but nothing against the sudden appearance of a colossus, a special, intelligent titan who looks like a skinned human and towers over the wall. As our three young protagonists (Eren, Armin and Mikasa) watch in horror, the giant



IMAGES © 2016 HAJIME ISAYAMA AND KODANSHA COMICS



smashes a hole in the wall, opening up the city/buffet to the horrors prowling outside.

You'd imagine that scenes like this were inspired by Japan's history with Kaiju, the giant monster genre that gave us *Godzilla* or *Pacific Rim*. Or perhaps "El Coloso" (The Colossus), the painting by 18th-century Spanish artist Francisco de Goya, which depicts a giant, naked man striding across a gloomy landscape while people scatter in terror at his feet. But it was actually an incident that occurred soon after Isayama's move to Tokyo at 20 that started it all: the struggling young artist, working a night job in an internet café, was roughed up by an angry, drunk customer. In that moment, he says he "felt the fear of meeting a person I can't communicate with," of being made to feel overwhelmed and small.

STARTING ROUGH

Isayama went on to refine the idea into a rough, 65-page one-shot that he pitched to various publishers, including Shintaro Kawakubo at *Weekly Shōnen Magazine*, a manga weekly published by Kodansha, which agreed to serialise a cleaned-up version of the idea in 2009.

THIS PAGE: The original sound effects are such an integral part of the art, the English editors wisely opted to leave them in place and just add English lettering where necessary.

"At the time," Kawakubo recalls, "it had been only one or two months since I was placed in the *Weekly Shōnen Magazine* editorial department, so I was basically a manga-loving college student who was just starting to cut his teeth. Even so, I could definitely feel the power coming from [that one-shot]. It was full of zeal, as if Mr. Isayama was saying, 'This is something I have to draw to make it to tomorrow.' I remember praising him for that at the time, and also giving him advice by saying that his art was messy and that he needed to work on it."

Isayama, now aged 29, is notoriously self-deprecating

> **"IT'S AS IF HE WAS SAYING 'THIS IS SOMETHING I HAVE TO DRAW TO MAKE IT TO TOMORROW'"**

about his artwork. In one interview he says: "I've come to feel worse and worse about my art as I've gradually noticed how awkward it looks"; in another he describes *Attack On Titan* as "one of the worst drawn artworks [in Japanese manga]." Yet while it's true that *Attack On Titan* is not the most technically impressive of work, to belittle Isayama's style does a disservice to the sheer power of his imagination – especially when it comes to the idiosyncratic ugliness of the titans, a creation like no other.

The titans are unnerving on multiple levels. First there's the way they look: a crude, creepy take on human anatomy, each one special in its own perverse way (Isayama bases many of them on people he knows). But then there's also the way they act: giant man-babies who bounce around the world with glee, pulling off heads, snapping bones and flinging people around like ragdolls. It's later revealed that they don't even need to eat humans, as they have no digestive system. They just gorge on us for the hell of it, puking when they get full, their vomit a congealed mass of body parts.

THIS PAGE: Isayama acknowledges that his artwork lacks polish, but it has a directness and legibility that gets the point across, and the basic strength of the concept shines through.

They're also surprisingly difficult to kill, with their only weak spot located on the back of the neck. It's a kill-stroke that can only be reached by the Survey Corps, an elite band of titan-killers who are able to fly around the giants using a high-

speed grappling device. It's through this unit that we follow Armin, Mikasa and Eren, who join the squad after the attack by the colossal titan. (It's all made a little bit more complicated when – in a shock twist – Eren is revealed to be something more than human.)

TITANS AND TEENS

Beyond horror, novelty and gore, it's these – mostly teenage – members of the Survey Corps who make *Attack On Titan* work: a well-developed, character-driven ensemble who leave us in little doubt of the hell they are living through. For in this cruel, nihilistic world, people are either terrified or traumatised. You won't find heroes here – many snap under the pressure or discover that they're cowards, and there is certainly no dignity in death, which is frequent but never taken for granted. Even the most treasured of characters are killed off in the most savage of ways, and their loss is felt. In fact, *Attack On Titan* – a silly-sounding story about giants – is pretty much defined by death. The fear of it. The reality. The exhausting, never-ending grief

ABOVE: The Chinese government has banned *Attack On Titan*, along with 37 other manga and anime titles that "include scenes of violence, pornography, terrorism and crimes against public morality.".

of war. As Kawakubo, now Isayama's editor, explains: "Mr. Isayama feels strongly about the idea that death comes to us all equally, and he seems to dislike the idea that some characters should have spectacular deaths simply because they are important while others die in the margins because they are not."

With all that heaviness in mind, it's little wonder that many have read the world of

"MR. ISAYAMA FEELS STRONGLY ABOUT THE IDEA THAT DEATH COMES TO US ALL EQUALLY"

Attack On Titan – a society that lives in constant fear of invading forces – as a metaphor for something more serious. A nationalistic call to arms for the young of Japan? An allegory for post-nuclear disaster? An expression of the anxiety of living in a country prone to devastating earthquakes?

All of these have been denied. "I do find these kinds of hypotheses interesting," says Kawakubo, "as they are proof >

5 MAGNIFICENT MANGA TITLES

If you like *Attack On Titan*, why not try some of these other awesome manga series with a twist...

1 ONE-PUNCH MAN: The tale of impossibly strong Saitama, who – much to his boredom – can destroy any monster with a single punch. Wry and surreal, it's a novel take on the superhero genre, with Saitama mostly using his powers to seek out bigger and better foes in hope of a challenge.

2 TOKYO GHOUL: Ghouls, who survive only by eating human flesh, face humanity in a thriller set in the streets of Tokyo. In the middle is Ken Kaneki, a half-ghoul freshman who must navigate between his love for humanity and his insatiable hunger for its flesh. *Twilight* it is not.

3 PLANETES: An SF classic collected in a deluxe, English omnibus by Dark Horse. More soap opera than space opera, it follows the lives of DS-12, a crew who clear the Earth's orbit of debris, lest it damage passing craft. It's not the most glamorous job, but that's entirely the point.

4 ASSASSINATION CLASSROOM: A powerful octopus-creature destroys 70% of the moon. He claims Earth is next but is willing to give humanity a chance by becoming a teacher at a Japanese school and giving his students a year to kill him. Too bad he's the best teacher ever!

5 PROPHECY: In this crime thriller, vigilante Shinbushi – "Newspaper Man" – takes the work of the Tokyo Police Dept's Cybercrime division into his own hands. Disguised in a mask made out of newspaper, he soon becomes an internet sensation – before getting carried away...

that Mr. Isayama has been able to capture the true hearts of readers around the world. I think it's very interesting that people around the world from all walks of life are able to relate to the characters in a manga title after some deep thought."

One of the main things to understand about the success of *Attack On Titan* in the West is that – catchy premise or not – it would never have happened without the rich and thrilling anime adaptation.

ANIME MAGIC

"The difference in sales before and after the anime was like night and day," says Ben Applegate, who edits the English edition of *Attack On Titan*. "We started releasing the comic in the summer of 2012. At first it didn't really strike a chord. It was doing okay, but we were getting a lot of returns. Then the anime hit in the Spring of 2013 and that's when it really took off. Since then it's been sales record after sales record. Definitely a once-in-a-decade kind of hit in the US, as well as Japan.

"The anime got people to discover it and, once they did, they kept picking it up and telling their friends, and word of mouth was a big help. It's one of the rare manga/anime properties that's got into the mainstream and I'm really very grateful for that. I think if you ask other manga publishers they'd say the same thing: it's been part of the revitalisation of the manga market overall in the United States. It's bringing people back into bookstores, and that has helped not just us, but other publishers as well."

In general, manga has always inhabited a strange place in the English-speaking world: while its popularity has continued to grow, it's still commonly treated as something different from comics, all the more so as superhero movies have become more mainstream. Writing for *Paste Magazine* in mid-2015, journalist Shea Hennum summed this up well in an article titled "What Our Failure to Cover *Attack On Titan* Says About the Comic Industry": "Two parallel mainstreams

ABOVE: .The titans are like a force of nature – relentless, but also apparently completely random and senseless.

"TO CREATORS AND READERS, MANGA IS NOT JUST THIS THING TO BE PUT IN A SEPARATE BOX"

seem to have developed. One mainstream includes Marvel, DC (and very soon Image) and the other entails books [like *Attack On Titan*] that actually dominate the sales charts" – in other words, the media (and particularly popular culture specialist media) think of one kind of comics as mainstream, while the buying public favour another category entirely.

Applegate believes, however, that *Attack On Titan* might just be what it takes to bring the two traditions closer together. Kodansha US is even planning a crossover with the *Attack On Titan Anthology*: a 250-page opportunity for Western comic creators such as Scott Snyder, Brenden Fletcher, Babs Tarr and Gail Simone to create original stories set in the *Attack On Titan* universe.

"I think the demographics have changed," says Applegate. "Right now, in Western comics even from Marvel and DC, there is a generation of people who've grown up reading manga who are now coming into comics. Brenden Fletcher, Cameron Stewart, the team on *Batgirl* right now, there's definite manga influence in their storytelling. And if you ask them to name their comics influences, they'll name manga as well as graphic novels and comics from the West. I think a similar transition is happening to readership as well, which is beginning to cross over more with comics. Manga is not just this thing to be put in a separate box, that's not for them. They just see manga as comics."

THIS PAGE: Part of the appeal of *Attack On Titan* is the focus on the young, well-rounded protagonists – but Isayama does not hesitate to kill off characters both major and minor

THE LONG DARK KNIGHT OF THE SOUL

Ready for a Batman tale with a difference? **Will Salmon** talks to Paul Dini and Eduardo Risso about *Dark Night: A True Batman Story*...

In 1993, Paul Dini was enjoying the first flushes of success from *Batman: The Animated Series*. The show would come to define his career and introduce the much-loved (and soon to be seen in movies) Harley Quinn to the world. But a walk home one night led to a chance encounter that left Dini emotionally and physically scarred. Twenty-three years later, Dini has transformed his experiences into *Dark Night: A True Batman Story* – an original graphic novel to be published by DC Vertigo in June. We caught up with Paul and the book's artist Eduardo Risso, previously best known for his work on *100 Bullets*, to find out more...

Comic Heroes: Paul, can you tell us a little about the violent incident that happened to you in 1993?
Paul Dini: I was walking home from a date one night in late January. I was a couple blocks from my home in West Hollywood when two individuals I thought were neighborhood residents grabbed and beat me. The attack was unexpected and brutal. They smashed my face several times and when I fell down they kicked me in the head and all over my body. They robbed me, threatened to kill me, and as I was staggering home, tried to hit me with their car. Part of the left side of my skull was broken, which required me to undergo restorative facial surgery.

CH: How far were you into making *Batman: The Animated Series* at this point and did the incident feed into your work at all?
PD: It took place a few months after the animated series premiered. I was about to start writing the script for "Mask Of The Phantasm" with Alan Burnett, Martin Pasko and Michael Reaves, as well as a new season of *Batman* episodes. After the mugging, the idea of a costumed crime-fighter battling fantastic villains didn't seem very appealing to me. In cartoons and comics the villains are always defeated or brought to justice. In real life the victim has to pick himself up and restart his life as best he can. For a while I never wanted to write *Batman* again. But then I realised if I walk away from something I enjoy doing, and as it turned out, lots of people liked, I was letting the attackers beat me again. So when I started writing *Batman* again, every script became, for me, a personal victory over the muggers. You guys may have given me one bad night, but you didn't win, and you never will.

CH: Why transform this incident into a graphic novel?

> **"I REALISED IF I WALKED AWAY FROM SOMETHING I ENJOY I WAS LETTING THE ATTACKERS WIN"**

PD: Seeing it as a story brings a certain amount of closure to the incident. I know people who have gone through worse experiences and never had a chance to tell their story. My friend, Lobo creator Roger Slifer, for one. He was mowed down by a hit-and-run driver and never recovered. No one saw anything, no ID of the car was ever made, and no one came forward to accept responsibility for what they did. There was no justice for Roger. At least I was given a forum to tell other people who suffered similar traumatic incidents that if I can get through it, they can get through it too.

CH: Did you think of Bruce Wayne and Batman's origins at the time of the attack?
PD: Oh, sure. My story is nowhere near as tragic as Bruce's, but the randomness of the attack, the fact the muggers got away scot-free, I couldn't help but think of parallels. I wasn't about to put on a cape and patrol the city at night in my Volkswagen Cabriolet, but I did become more careful about where I walked and I started reporting strangers in the neighborhood to the police. That's as far as I went into acting like Batman.

CH: Has the story been percolating in your mind for all this time?
PD: It's been in my head ever since the incident, 23 years ago. I don't think I could have told the story back then, or for at least ten years after. I was too angry. Angry with the attackers and angry with myself for being a victim. I had a lot of growing to do as a writer and as a person before I could tell the story in a way that felt right to me.

CH: Was it hard, or exposing, writing about yourself and revisiting these events – even in this semi-fictionalised context?
PD: It was like opening Pandora's box every night and letting old demons out. Some nights they were easy to

deal with, some nights they just camped out on top of me like the imp in Henry Fuseli's "The Nightmare" paintings. There were things I originally balked at writing about, such as cutting myself and drinking, but I recognised they were all pieces that made up the larger story. I felt, I'm in this far, I may as well throw it all on the table. Dealing with it dispels shadows – one less demon squatting on my belly at night.

CH: What led to the pair of you collaborating?
PD: Eduardo was on a short list of artists we wanted to approach about the project. I'm a huge fan of his work on *100 Bullets* with Brian Azzarello and of the great Batman stories they did together. I was thrilled to "steal" him away from Brian for a bit to create the visual world of *Dark Night*. It is a world that I felt had to be visibly different from that of the animated series. I needed a contrast between the animated and "real world" look, and I wanted Batman and the villains drawn from Eduardo's imagination more than from existing models or even my descriptions. The versions of Joker, Poison Ivy and Penguin he created are wonderfully nightmarish, and unique to this story.
Eduardo: Shelly Bond, the executive editor of Vertigo, was very excited about this project. It was something new and different to what they typically publish. To get me involved she just had to add the magic words: Paul Dini.

CH: Did you approach the art in *Dark Night* differently to how you would on a "normal" Batman book, or use any different techniques?
ER: I took the project with the intention of doing something different from what I was doing. I used different techniques and added my own colour. I honestly don't know if I achieved the goal.

What qualities do you think the art brings to the book?
PD: Eduardo brings a sense of realism to the book, both in terms of the design and the action. When I saw his depiction of the attack, it was so true and so visceral that I couldn't look at it again until a week later. It was like being punched again, which was exactly the emotional impact I wanted. I wanted the readers to feel what I felt, and I knew if I cried out when I saw it, they would have the same reaction. Likewise, the quiet moments play just as powerfully. The scenes of solitude, and despair, and finally, of acceptance and resolve.
ER: The story goes through several moods. There are a lot of time jumps, something that looked interesting in words, but is not easy to reflect with art. I tried to do my best and now the readers will decide whether the target was achieved or not.

Eduardo, is it fun to put your own twist on characters as famous as Batman and the Joker?
ER: This depends on the personality the writer gives each character. I just have to give body and nature to the character. In this particular case, I only paid attention to the time period of the story. There are several time jumps and the same characters are different at different times.

What do superheroes mean to you personally, if anything?
ER: I grew up not reading superhero stories. Every time I am offered the opportunity to draw one of them (thankfully, there have not been many of them) it has been a great challenge. Because I don't know their story, I fear I'll make unintentional mistakes and I'm aware that readers are passionate. Drawing them can lead you to be unceremoniously loved or hated, ha ha!

How about you, Paul? Batman is clearly an important figure in your life. What makes him so enduring?
PD: Batman represents, I think, the strong, driven force for justice that we all wish we could be. Who wouldn't like to put on the cool suit, jump in the Batmobile and zoom out to punish the wicked? It's a highly potent fantasy and one that generations of kids have embraced almost from birth. But when the bad guys are real, and you have only yourself to rely on, that's when you really have to "Batman up" as best you can, even if that just means standing up again and going on.

Are you excited to see Harley Quinn brought to life on screen in the Suicide Squad movie?
PD: Oh yeah. That looks like great fun! I saw a shot of the Joker and Harley streaking through the city with Batman on top of their big purple car, and thought, "Well, that seems about right!"

> "BATMAN REPRESENTS THE STRONG FORCE FOR JUSTICE WE ALL WISH WE COULD BE"

IMAGES © 2016 DC VERTIGO

HI.
MY NAME IS ARCHIE ANDREWS.
WELCOME TO RIVERDALE.
RETURN TO
RIVERDAL

RIVERDALE

SUPERHERO SUPERSTAR MARK WAID TELLS WILL SALMON ABOUT TRANSFORMING ARCHIE FROM A TRAD AMERICAN ICON INTO ONE OF THE COOLEST COMICS AROUND...

Superheroes may have been all the rage in the '40s – they still are! – but one of American comics' greatest characters is a redheaded teenager whose only real concerns are hanging out, having fun with his friends, and dating.

Archie Andrews made his first appearance in *Pep Comics #22*, coverdated December 1941, published by MLJ Magazines. Based in part on Mickey Rooney, he was a klutz, but a loveable one, and it wasn't long before he was headlining his own book alongside best pal Jughead Jones, sworn enemy Reggie Mantle and the two great loves of his life: Betty Cooper and Veronica Lodge. Archie's adventures were funny and whimsical, the town of Riverdale a safe and cozy world where the spirit of the '50s forever lingered, no matter the decade in the real world.

Originally devised by publisher John L. Goldwater, then written and drawn by Vic Bloom and Bob Montana, the Archie gang struck an immediate chord with teenagers, and MLJ was soon renamed Archie Comic Publications. The company set about releasing innumerable series based on the characters. The formula was simple: Archie was decent but clumsy and romantically torn between Betty and Veronica. Slacker Jughead was lazy and liked to eat. The wealthy Veronica was vain and shallow, while Betty was a more earnest and wholesome girl-next-door type. And after that? Well, Archie stayed more or less the same. You could call that stagnation, but there's no doubt the series' consistency was also one of the keys to its lasting appeal.

CHANGE IN THE AIR

But things have changed. A clear turning point came with the arrival of Goldwater's son, Jon, as co-CEO in 2009. The comic had always nodded to issues of the day, but under the young Goldwater it saw the introduction of Kevin Keller, Riverdale's first gay character, who would prove popular enough to earn a spinoff series. And after decades of teasing out the Betty and Veronica love triangle, *Archie #600-606* by writer Michael Uslan and artists Stan Goldberg and Bob Smith saw Arch sensationally marry *both* Betty and Veronica. Fear not – it wasn't bigamy, simply a fantasy.

That arc led the way to *Life With Archie, Vol 2*, scripted by Paul Kupperberg. This spinoff series followed the parallel

universe lives of Arch and Betty, and Arch and Veronica. It was more mature in tone than the regular books, with a stronger emotional core, and it ended in 2014 with both universes arriving at the same dramatic point: Archie's death by gunshot wound, as he saves (now Senator) Kevin Keller's life.

He remained alive and well in other books, of course. The company publishes many Digests that include both new and reprint stories in which the status quo remains resolutely unchanged. But it was *Life With Archie* that was earning headlines – as was horror series *Afterlife With Archie* (see boxout). The time was clearly right for the company to do something radical with its flagship series...

REINVENTION

"I first discovered Archie when I was a kid, like most of us," says Mark Waid. The superstar writer, who made his name with titles like *Kingdom Come* and *Superman: Birthright*, was enlisted by Archie Comics to reinvent its flagship title. "Before I was a picky teenager, I was a boy eager to read any comic I could get my hands on – and *Archie* comics, unlike horror or war books, were something my parents trusted to help bring me up right."

Archie Volume 2 is a ground-up reinvention. Gone are decades of (admittedly loose) continuity and familiar tropes, replaced with razor-sharp wit, a keener focus on characterisation, and fantastic, fresh art from Fiona Staples, Annie Wu and – now established as the book's regular penciller – Veronica Fish. *Vol. 2* feels simultaneously familiar and fresh, and it's fantastic – one of the smartest, most purely enjoyable ongoing comics around at the moment. It's also been a hit, with a spinoff focussing on Jughead also proving wildly popular.

> "ALL KIDS, NO MATTER WHEN, LOOK AT EVERYTHING LIKE IT'S GRAND OPERA"

To reinvent the character, however, meant jettisoning some aspects of the past. When we ask Waid what aspects of the old series needed to be rethought, he says: "Let me preface my answer by saying, unequivocally, that on my best day I have only a fraction of the talent of most of the fine men and women who've guided the Archie cast for the past 75 years, so nothing I say should be construed as a criticism. By and large, the original series still 'worked.' The problem with any long-standing series, whether it's in comics or on TV or wherever, is that the edges on the characters tend to get sanded down over the years as everyone gets along better (as any cast would if they had to spend 75 years as students in the same high school!). I thought the cast, without making them at all unlikeable, could stand to have a little more friction between them so that their actions have consequences and drama."

Crucially, that meant injecting some tension into the series' central love triangle. "I couldn't wrap my head around Betty and Veronica being besties and yet having knife-fights over the same boy," muses Waid. Likewise, the writer felt Archie himself needed a little retooling. "I couldn't get

AFTERLIFE WITH ARCHIE

The thought of an Archie horror comic is a laughing one, but it works brilliantly. The series by Roberto Aguirre-Sacasa and Francesco Francavilla is a wonderful romp, not so much for the gratuitous – and it's a genuine horror comic that lives up to its hype as brilliantly as it sold there. The series debuted to a fan in May last year but as we write this, issue 9 has been announced for June with a new issue of its [illegible] Zelda Lee [illegible] of Sabrina and on its way in May.

comfortable with Archie acting like girls were prizes to be won, so we rethought the Archie/Betty/Veronica love triangle."

The key to this was grounding the series in an emotional reality. In *Archie Vol. 2*, Archie and Betty have been dating since they were in kindergarten, but have recently split following a mysterious and much-speculated-on "lipstick incident". Betty is heartbroken, while Archie is deeply fed up but distracted by the arrival of new girl Veronica Lodge. Meanwhile, a threat comes in the form of Reggie – jealous and resentful of Archie's popularity, and plotting revenge like some high school Iago.

"You needed to have a strong sense of caring, really caring, what these kids did and why," says Waid. "Really sharing in their feelings with every broken heart, every failing grade, every football touchdown. If the readers aren't invested in what the kids are going through, they won't come back."

But how *do* you make these characters, first imagined in 1940, relevant to readers in the modern age? "You drill down to the core of what's constant about being a teenager regardless of the era or the generation," Waid says. "All kids, no matter when they grew up, look at everything like it's grand opera. Everything that happens to them is the first time it's ever happened to anyone in the world. Every setback is an unimaginable tragedy. Every moment of embarrassment will last forever and ever. We all felt like that. I just have to remember what it was like back when I had my first kiss or when my biggest problem

AND LIL' FORSYTHE GOT A NICKNAME AND A LIFE-LESSON THAT LINGERED TO THIS DAY!
I LIKE YOUR SHIRT! DID IT COST A THOUSAND DOLLARS?
AH HA HA HA HA!
HEY "JUGHEAD"! WHY YOU HANGING OUT HERE? YOUR PILOT LIGHT'S GOTTA HELICOPTER FUEL?
HA HA HA HA!

was that I didn't have my book report done and how it felt like the end of the world... and replicate those feelings and remind you what they were like."

STAYING COMICAL

Of course, Archie was never just about the relationships. It was a *funny book* in both senses, so keeping the new Archie witty was also a priority. "Comedy was essential," says Waid. "And not just wordplay, but broad slapstick as well. The goal is to make sure every story has at least one big comedy set-piece full of mayhem and with a little absurdity to it, delivered in the way only comics can deliver.

> "COMEDY WAS ESSENTIAL. NOT JUST WORDPLAY BUT SLAPSTICK AS WELL"

"I never would have predicted it, but Archie himself is the funnest character to write," Waid continues. "He doesn't get the best jokes, but I have a ball writing him in slapstick moments like setting an ice cream stand on fire or wreaking havoc on a construction site. That kid's indestructible."

The book's pages are also littered with visual gags. "Fiona was astounding," says Waid of the book's original artist, who was herself an old-school Archie fan. "She made everything better with every stroke of her pen. We talked early on about the tone and the goals and the characters and the kinds of stories we wanted to tell, and I was relieved from the start to learn that she and I were very much on the same page. Fiona loves Archie like I love Superman, so I knew if I got her blessing, we were good."

Staples left the title after just three issues, to continue working on *Saga*. That might have been disastrous, had the book not found two ideal replacements in the form of *Black Canary* artist Annie Wu, who drew #4, and ongoing artist Veronica Fish, who picked up the reins with #5.

"Annie hit it out of the park with her issue," says Waid. "And Veronica Fish is an artist to whom I've made it clear that, like it or not, we are now bonded. As a collaborator, I'll let her go outside if she's good and stays in sight, but she's not allowed to cross the street and she's certainly not allowed to get in a car with Brian K. Vaughan if she's offered a ride!" Fish's style

RIVERDALE ON TV

is looser and more cartoony than Staples', playing up the madder aspects of the series, but still feels connected to a credible world with believable people in it.

NEW TRICKS

The reception to *Vol. 2* has been nothing short of joyous. And while you don't throw out 75 years of stories without annoying someone, Waid says he's yet to encounter any resistance. "I was prepared for it. And I know I'm asking for trouble by saying this but, literally, honestly, sincerely, I have yet to come across a single reader who's actually read what we're doing and is still resistant. Knock on wood."

This has come as a relief, Waid admits frankly. "Honestly, I was terrified that the readers might not accept some of the new wrinkles, like Veronica not even showing up in Riverdale until issue three – but we seem to have earned their faith. I've made a nice little career out of character overhauls, but this wasn't some second-string superhero. This was the Mirth of a Nation. I had to dig deep to find the most honourable approach."

Waid is cagey about what the future holds for the title. "Now that Veronica's father has learned that it was Archie's fault his mansion was destroyed, it's war between the two – and Archie's carrying a slingshot into a grenade fight," he teases. He also hints at the return of more classic Archie characters. "I like switching it up, but on the whole, whenever I need a character to fill a role in the plot, I always turn to the established supporting cast first to see if there's someone there who makes sense. That's the beauty of Riverdale – it's a giant wellspring of potentially fascinating characters!"

But one thing we shouldn't expect any time soon are the crossovers that old-school Archie became known for (Predator! Punisher! Sharknado!). "For now it's sticking strictly to its own continuity. In year two, it might be fun to switch things up, do some sort of crossover. What's the audience today interested in? *Gilligan's Island*? Is that still a thing? I'm kidding. But give me an *Archie/Batman '66* crossover to write and I'll earn you all the money in the world." Now *that* we would pay to see...

ALL IMAGES © 2016 ARCHIE COMICS

A CALL TO ARMS

BRIAN MICHAEL BENDIS TALKS TO STEPHEN JEWELL ABOUT HELMING THE SEQUEL TO MARVEL'S ULTIMATE SMACKDOWN

With *Captain America: Civil War* hitting the big screen and also the tenth anniversary of the first *Civil War* mini-series, you'd think a sequel to Mark Millar and Steve McNiven's landmark 2006 seven-parter would be an obvious move. But according to Brian Michael Bendis, this year's big Marvel event wasn't conceived as a sequel. As Bendis explains it, he and Marvel editor-in-chief Axel Alonso had been talking over the months "about our frustrations about the state of the world, and the comic book world that we were writing about, and 'wouldn't it be great to find a story that would put the heroes in a kind of moral conundrum'. We then went to [Marvel publisher] Dan Buckley with the pieces that we had, and he said 'This is *Civil War II*!'"

Above: With Bendis at the helm, this summer s crossover will be as much about personal choices as ep c batt es

After Jonathan Hickman and Esad Ribic's follow-up last year to 1984's inaugural Marvel crossover *Secret Wars*, Bendis was open to the idea. "Years ago, I'd wondered why we don't do sequels to those big events," he says. "Some of them kind of hit a peak like with *Secret Invasion*, where we kind of hit Skrull-peak, so we're not going to do another one of those. But there are other events, where I thought so much has been invested in them that if there was another story to tell, if it wasn't just a beat-by-beat shitty rip-off and if it continued the story in a good sequel-like way, such as with *The Godfather II*, then we should consider it.

"The idea we've come up with is completely different from the first *Civil War*. But thematically it puts the heroes in opposition to each other, so no matter what we

"THE IDEA IS COMPLETELY DIFFERENT FROM THE FIRST CIVIL WAR BUT IT SETS HEROES AGAINST EACH OTHER"

call it, people would have said 'It's *Civil War II*!' So we might as well call it *Civil War II*."

A little over ten years ago, as *Avengers* writer at the time, Bendis was present at the Marvel retreat where *Civil War* was brought to life. It came about after an idea for another event series failed to gel with those present. "Our biggest concern was that it didn't really affect the Marvel Universe, or change it on the same scope [as] the events that we'd done in the past," he recalls. "The next morning I said 'We need an event that really draws a line in the sand.' So someone said 'How about villains vs. heroes for civil rights?' And Mark Millar then said 'No, it's the superheroes vs. the superheroes!' And Jeph Loeb said 'And whose side are you on!' Everybody saw dollar signs in their eyes, and it quickly came together."

While Millar was "clearly the guy to write the main series," Bendis's role on *Avengers* and *New Avengers* meant he was in an ideal position to contribute numerous stories to *Civil War*'s larger canvas. "Everything that I wanted to write about, Mark wasn't interested in at all, so I got to write the prologue and epilogue, while my *Avengers* tie-ins were like character pieces and situations that I felt were the best stuff," he says. "It was a very interesting experience, so when the opportunity to do this series came along, I gave a lot of thought to what was so appealing about the first series, and I really do think it was those amazing character moments. People think that it was just one battle after another, but it actually wasn't like that at all."

Above: *Civil War II* begins in May with a Free Comic Book Day issue, followed by a double-sized zero issue, before the series proper debuts in June

Re-reading *Civil War* recently, Bendis was immediately struck by

how much the Marvel Universe has changed, mostly for the better, in the intervening ten years. "There are a lot of new players like Kamala Khan, Miles Morales, Nova and the Inhumans, while Thor is a woman and Captain America is African-American," he says. "There are so many elements of the Marvel Universe that aren't what they were ten years ago, so to put them all in a big production number like this is very interesting on its own, let alone once you add this giant moral conundrum that they have to face."

Civil War II will also reflect what is happening in the real world. "Here in the America, politics is so out of control, outlandish and almost cartoonish that it would be hard to write something that's even crazier than what's actually going on. We live in a world where the accountability for one's words and actions is at an all-time low, but it's actually never been more important, and that's a big part of what the series is about."

Above: Civil War II will draw in the whole of the Marvel Universe and see numerous spin-offs and tie-ins all summer long

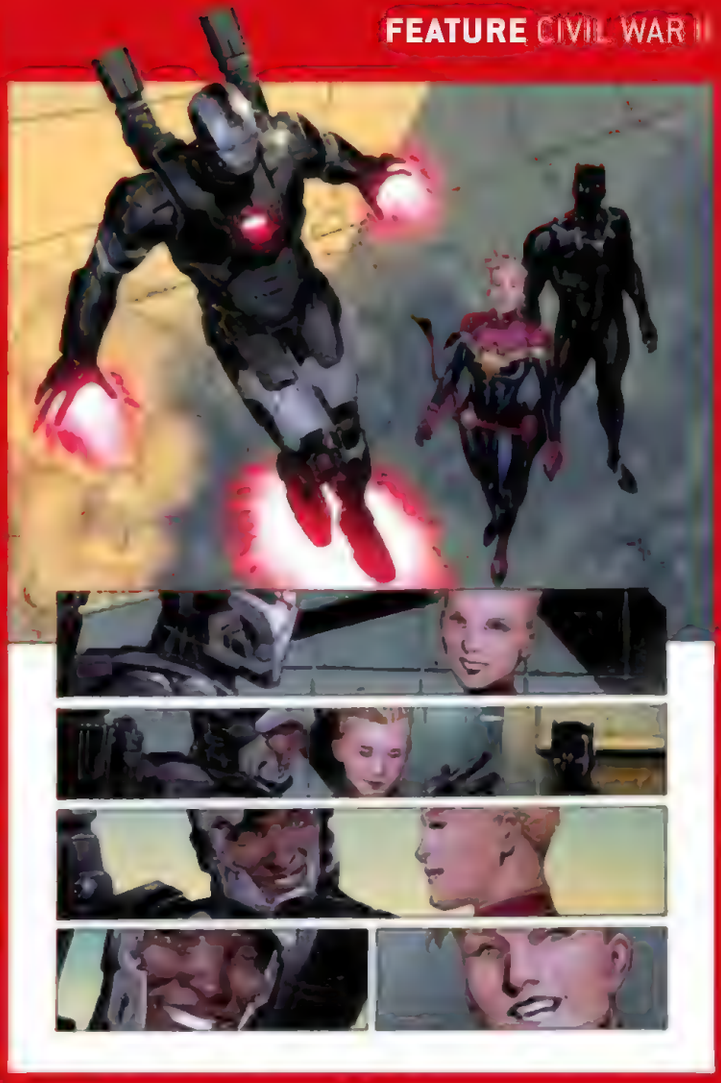
Civil War II begins in May with a Free Comic Book Day issue drawn by Jimmy Cheung. Then Bendis teams up with Oliver Coipel on the double-sized zero issue, and the series proper debuts in June with another extra-length instalment.

LAST LINE OF DEFENCE

After the emergence of a new Inhuman who boasts the ominous ability to predict future events, a bitter split occurs within Marvel's superhero community. Bendis says: "Some of the heroes want to take full advantage of this power but others don't, and they all feel very strongly about it. The repercussions of what this Inhuman's power does to the Marvel Universe are very profound and powerful, and, for some of the heroes, very personal."

The opposing factions are led by Iron Man and Captain Marvel. The latter's involvement builds on developments in her own, recently re-launched monthly, now scripted by *Agent Carter* showrunners Tara Butters and Michele Fazekas, as well as *The Ultimates*, written by Al Ewing, which she is also part of.

Having taken charge of a newly reinvented Alpha Flight, which is positioning itself as Earth's last line of defence, "Carol Danvers is already on a profound quest to proactively fight for our future," says Bendis. "It's like 'Let's deal with Galactus before he gets hungry,' whereas Tony Stark initially sees things differently. So the heroes are all going to be tested very strongly, to the point where some of them might end up



switching sides somewhere in the story. What they're being presented with by this Inhuman is a real test of all their characters, and what do they believe in, and how far are they willing to go to protect that?"

That said, the ethical dilemma that the heroes confront in *Civil War II* is more nuanced than the one in the original series, making for some interesting discussions about where exactly the likes of Thor, Ms. Marvel or Steve Rogers and Sam Wilson's respective Captain Americas will stand. "I had a long conversation with all the other writers, and then [Marvel Executive Editor] Tom Brevoort put together a list of where the consensus was," says Bendis. "With certain heroes, there was a giant consensus that they would definitely feel this way or that, [but] I wanted to hear from the writers that were writing particular characters right now.

"What was very interesting was that a lot of writers wanted their character to be the one that changed their opinion somewhere in the story, like they wanted them to be Spider-Man, who flipped sides in *Civil War*, so we've played with that element as well, like where in the story would this character switch sides?"

Bendis will be joined on *Civil War II* by artist David Marquez. The two previously collaborated on *Ultimate Spider-Man* and last year's *Invincible Iron Man* reboot. "He's kind of become the visual voice of Marvel over the past couple of years, as his art was used for the main All-New All-Different Marvel imagery," says Bendis. "We had initially agreed to do a long run on *Iron Man* but the opportunity to do this series came up, so I sat down with David and said 'You're going to want to do this,' which, of course, he did."

Above: Preview pages from the Free Comic Book Day issue that kicks things off, drawn by Jimmy Cheung.

Having been matched with Leinil Yu on *Secret Invasion* and Olivier Coipel on *House Of M*, Bendis has plenty of experience of orchestrating an epic summer crossover, which he has been able to pass on to Marquez. "Creatively, it's next-level stuff and its every artist's dream to do a book like this," he says. "I'm writing it completely for David and playing towards all his strengths as an artist and storyteller. David's rivalling George Perez with the amount of detail that he's bringing to the book, as the story starts very big, going from Tony Stark sitting alone in his laboratory and then everyone in the Marvel Universe then shows up."

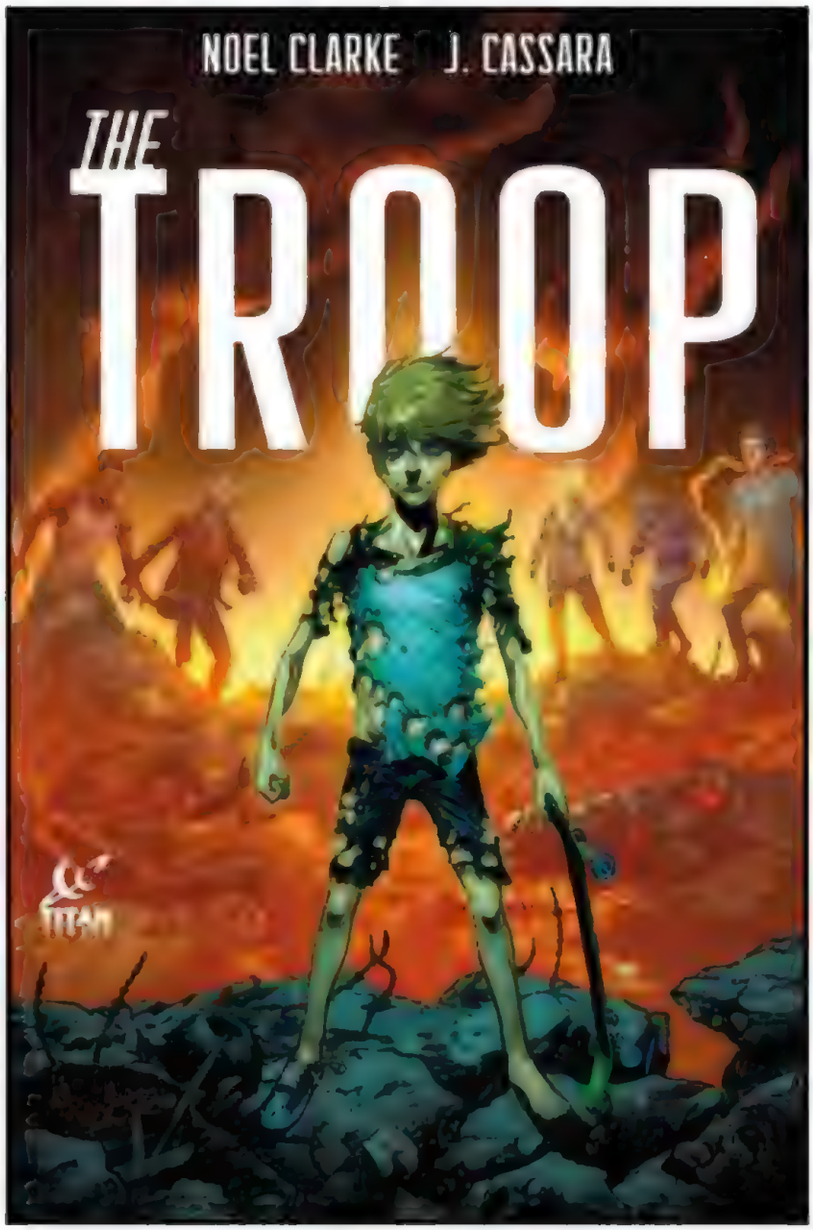
FAMILY TIES

FROM ACTOR, SCREENWRITER AND DIRECTOR TO COMICS CREATOR, NOEL CLARKE TALKS TO WILL SALMON ABOUT HIS X-RATED SUPERBOOK THE TROOP

Noel Clarke needs no introduction. As an actor he starred in several seasons of *Auf Wiedersehen, Pet* and *Doctor Who*, and his ongoing movie career has included blockbusters like *Star Trek Into Darkness* and smaller indie flicks such as *Storage 24*. He's also won acclaim for his work behind the camera as a writer and director. He penned the hard-hitting movie *Kidulthood*, then wrote and directed its sequel, *Adulthood*. But while Noel is putting the finishing touches to the third in the trilogy, *Brotherhood*, he is also fulfilling a lifelong dream by releasing a comic – the first of two set in the same original universe.

The Troop, published by Titan and currently heading towards the conclusion of its first run, mixes a love of superheroes – notably *The X-Men* – with the grit for which his films are known. It follows a group of teens who have developed superpowers, following experiments on their parents. They're struggling to get to grips with their abilities as it is, without drawing the attentions of a deadly religious cult.

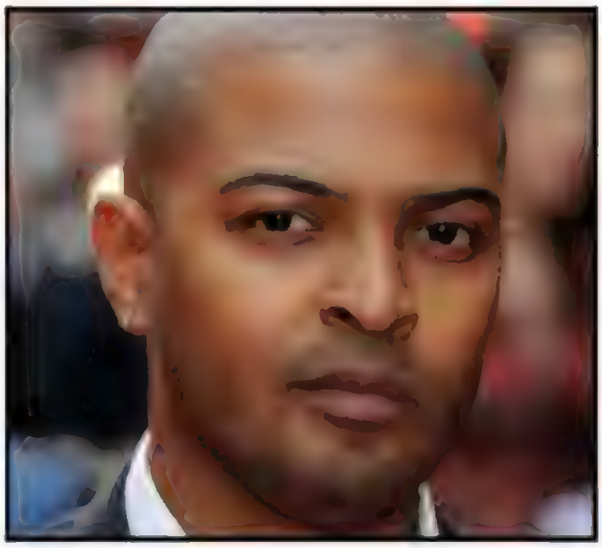
The Troop is enormous fun. It's dark and gritty – but also leavened



with warmth and humanity. This isn't a grim '90s throwback, or a star's vanity project: it's a genuinely impressive debut. As the series rockets towards the conclusion of its first run, we sat down with Noel to find out more.

Comic Heroes: First, the obvious question: you already have two successful careers, as an actor and a director. Why did you choose to move into writing comics?
Noel Clarke: I've been a comics fan as long as I've been a film fan. I had *Batman* annuals and *Punisher* comics in the early '80s and I still have loads of boxes at my mum's house, at my house and on my iPad. I've just always loved them and I've always wanted to do one. I had the idea for *The Troop*, weirdly, in 1996. That's 20 years ago! Can you believe that? Showing my age.

CH: So what was it that made you revive the idea?
NC: I never had an outlet before. I got introduced to Titan, and they asked me my ideas and I said, "I've got two and they're in a shared universe". We started to work on both of them and *The Troop* is just the first to come out.



Above: Yes, you know the face... Noel Clarke will be familiar from his screen appearances but has many more strings to his bow – including his Titan Comics series *The Troop* (left).

CH: All of the main characters have different powers. How did you go about choosing them?
NC: In 1996 we – me and my cousin Levi, who passed away – were just thinking about different characters. It was like, wouldn't it be cool if there was a girl who could meld into rock? Or, what if there was a girl who could give you any disease that she knows the mechanics of? With Rush I just always thought it would be great if somebody was invulnerable but had no powers. He doesn't have super strength or anything like that. If a car lands on him, he can't lift it off, but technically he's not injured. Nothing's original these days, but I wanted interesting takes on powers that I hadn't really seen before, I guess.

CH: All the members of the Troop come from troubled backgrounds. Why is that?
NC: It just interests me more. Flawed characters interest me. There's a reason that characters like Wolverine are more popular than others. It's not just because they're bad-ass, it's because they're innately flawed. What I like about my films, *Kidulthood* and *Adulthood* in particular – some people have labelled them social commentary... That was never my ›

This page: It's not so much about the powers per se or the origin story, which it gets out of the way pretty quickly in issue 3: *The Troop* really focuses on the lives of interestingly flawed people.

> "THE TROOP IS AS MUCH ABOUT THESE KIDS' REGULAR LIVES AS IT IS ABOUT THE POWERS"

intention, but I do get it. I wrote them about what I was seeing and where I was at.

I was raised by a single mother. We weren't well off. I saw lots of other kids with dads and it made me angry. I now speak to my dad, but all of that stuff is material. Terrain [in *The Troop*] has the perfect family – her mum and dad together, loads of brothers and sisters, grandparents, dogs – until they're taken out. And you have young Virus, who didn't have any of that. Torrent, she had a good family, goes to university and her friend is killed. And then you've got Wish, who's the black guy adopted by the white parents and who has his own demons. All these things happen in life. I feel like with a comic that's not owned by a big corporation, I can talk about that stuff.

CH: It's a very character-led comic, isn't it?

NC: *The Troop* is as much about these kids' regular lives as it is about the powers. Obviously you have to jump in and show them where they are, but issue 4 in particular – which is my favourite, I think – really shows them in a different light. It shows them going to school, what their day jobs are. I really love that issue. The title of #4 is "Our Nothing Is Everything". The whole point is they all think they have nothing, but then they realise that in their nothing they have everything. They now have a family, they have friends, they have brothers and sisters. And they make a conscious decision to do something at the end of #5 which really bonds them as a band, like: this is The Troop.

CH: Why did you choose a team book over a single superhero?

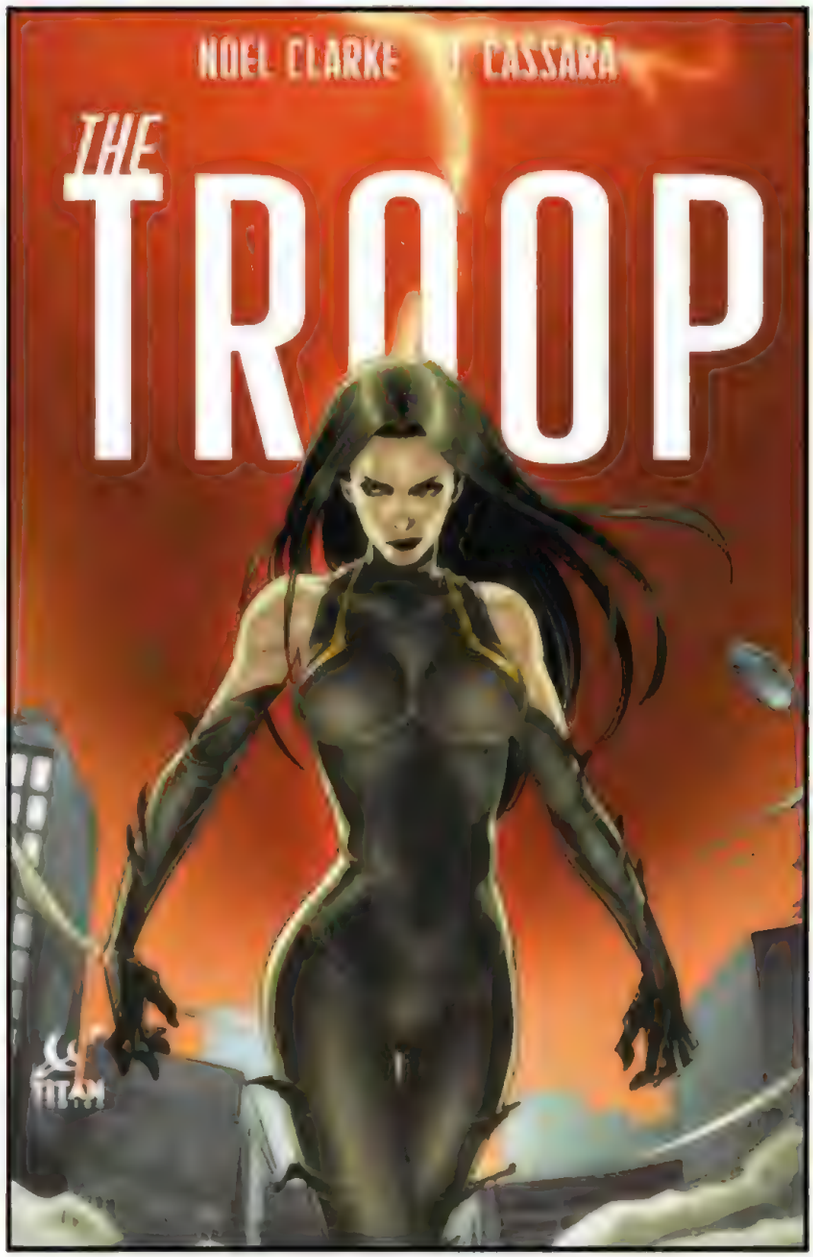
NC: Well, interestingly, you know I said that they went with two ideas? Well the first idea, which is currently being worked on, is a solo book. It's called *Girl One*. None of the kids in The Troop exist without Girl One – they just don't know it. Essentially everything that happens to her is the catalyst that makes The Troop possible… The serum that was created [and led to the powers of the characters in *The Troop*] was only able to be created because of her.

I'm a little bit wary of it as it's the first one I wrote. *The Troop* has come out before it and has been pretty well received and now I'm like… "What if people are like, 'What happened to him?!'"

CH: Would you like to see *The Troop* as a film?

NC: I've never considered it. This was not a cynical ploy to get a film made – I've just always wanted to do a comic. It was on my bucket list and now I've done it! I've got a comic and I love it and when it's collected I'll have a graphic novel, a collected edition, so that's all I've ever wanted to do with this. Obviously there have been people

SHE SOMETIMES SLEEPS WITH HER EYES OPEN WHICH IS PRETTY CREEPY.
HE GOT HER A DOG CALLED BEANS. THEY'RE INSEPARABLE. SO IF HE'S WANDERING AROUND EVEN IF HER EYES ARE OPEN, SHE'S SLEEPING



Above: You've seen teen team books before, but not like this. One reviewer likened it to "X-rated X-Men"...

Right: Variant cover to *The Troop* issue 3 by Yishan Li.

sniffing around and I'm not disappointed by that. I definitely don't think it's a film, but if it ends up being a TV show then hey, so be it. I think it'd be a great show on Amazon or Netflix or one of those. But that wasn't my intention.

CH: How are you enjoying working with Joshua Cassara?

NC: Titan paired me up with him. We were looking at artists and they were sending me samples and I was like "Dude, I love his work – he's going to bring so much life to this." We have a great shorthand. Some panels I really describe, others I just go "put in this, this, this and this" and he works it out. He's a really lovely guy as well.

CH: What is it about his style that you like the most?

NC: It's just the fine art, man. Back in the day I loved Chris Bachalo and J Scott Campbell. Josh has his own thing going. It's real, but there's a hint of cartooniness there too. I just love it. He's perfectly suited.

CH: There are several *Doctor Who* references scattered throughout – did that come from you or Josh?

NC: It was a bit of both. He's got Terrain reading a *Doctor Who* comic in issue 1, there's a sneaky TARDIS in issue 2 – I don't know if many people noticed that one. Yeah, it's just stuff that I like doing. It's pretty cool and we have fun with it, so we just shove a few things in.

CH: *The Troop* and *Girl One* are original. Are there any existing characters you'd like to write for?

NC: I feel I could do a really great take on DC's Wild Dog. Remember him? He was kinda DC's Punisher. *Action Comics* used to have a Superman story, a Blackhawk story and a Wild Dog story in each issue. I don't think they've ever got him right, with all due respect to the writers and creators. I feel like in 2016, when there's so much fearmongering and terrorism, I feel like that particular character could be really, really strong. A war veteran coming home, not being able to get a job – there's a lot of stuff that can be done with that.

Main image: Soule says his Daredevil draws on all that's gone before.

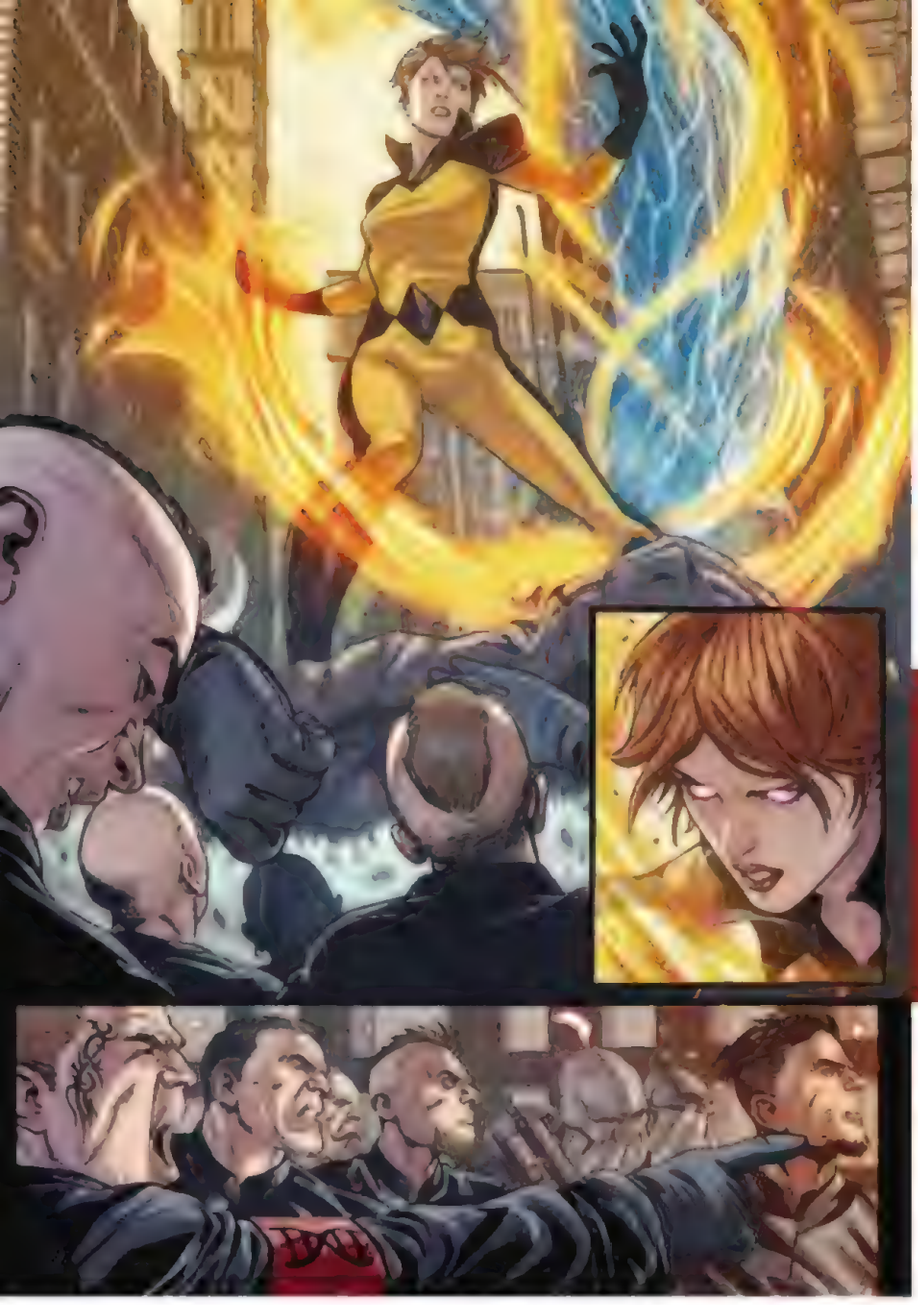
THE BUSIEST MAN IN COMICS?

IS **CHARLES SOULE** THE ONLY LAWYER TO HAVE ALSO WRITTEN DAREDEVIL? HE SPOKE TO **STEPHEN JEWELL** ABOUT TAKING ON THE INHUMANS, STAR WARS AND THE MAN WITHOUT FEAR'S ONGOING ADVENTURES

Charles Soule is one of Marvel's leading authors. Currently helming four monthly – sometimes twice-monthly – titles, including *Daredevil*, *Uncanny Inhumans* and *The Death of Wolverine*, he also somehow still finds the time to pen his creator-owned Oni series *Letter 44*, play guitar (in the appropriately named Charles Soule Band) – oh, and run a busy Brooklyn law firm.

"I don't stop to rest very often," he laughs. "I'm always moving on to the next thing, and I start to get extremely anxious and stressed out if I'm not doing anything for a while. It'll probably grind me into an early grave, but at the moment it's allowing me to a whole bunch of stuff that I like to do."

Growing up in Milwaukee in America's Midwest, Soule admits he was more of a "Marvel kid" than a DC aficionado. "It's usually about the first stuff that you're handed as a kid, and the first book I read was a *Fantastic Four* comic," he recalls. "My dad bought it for me to keep me quiet in the back of the car on a long drive. From there, I remember, reading *Secret Wars II* was a big deal for me, of all things, with The Beyonder, and I also read some *GI Joe* and *Transformers* comics. »



"I REALLY HOPE I WORK THERE AGAIN BECAUSE I LOVE THOSE CHARACTERS"

All of that was Marvel, and DC was something that I found more at college with books like *Dark Knight Returns* and *Watchmen*."

MAKING A MARK

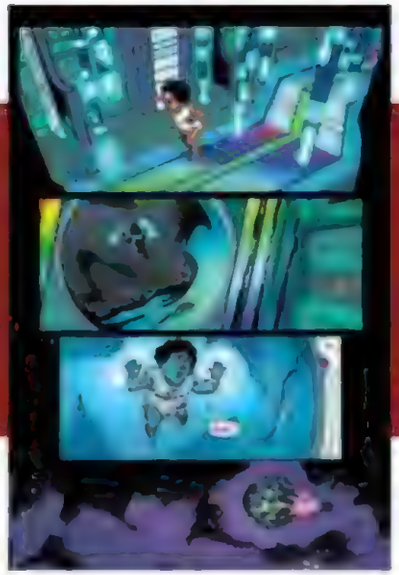
After releasing his debut graphic novel *Strongman* in 2009 through SLG Publishing, Soule first began making a name for himself with his 2010 Image series *Twenty-Seven*, which posited a supernatural answer as to why so many famous musicians die at that fateful age. Centred on a pair of super-smart mathematicians, *Strange Attractors* soon followed at Archaia Studio Press. But while the New York resident has mostly concentrated on company-owned properties since then (*Letter 44* excepted), creating his own characters remains important to him.

"It's crucial to the balance for me, as creator-owned of any type allows you to exercise a different type of muscles, as you think about different things," he says. "When I'm working on a big Marvel project like *The Death of Wolverine*, I have to think about a lot of things that aren't part of the equation when you're working on creator-owned. I can't really say that one is better than the other, as they both have different impacts on people and it's wonderful that your work is touching people. They're both good, and I hope I can keep them both going for as long as possible."

While now mostly associated with Marvel, having signed an exclusive deal in September 2014, Soule actually first made his mark at DC, initially as Scott Snyder's successor on the New 52's *Swamp Thing* (beginning with #19 in April 2013). He quickly went on to enjoy successful stints on *Red Lanterns* and *Superman/Wonder Woman*. Soon attracting the interest of Marvel, he assumed the reins on *Thunderbolts* with #12 in July 2013 before teaming with Javier Pulido for an acclaimed but short-lived run on *She-Hulk* in early 2014.

"I enjoyed my time at DC and all the books that I worked on there," he reflects. "I really hope I work there again some day because I love those characters very much, but you have to choose your path a little bit and, at that point in my career, it appeared that it would be smart to find a place where I could really focus in and get a

This page: Soule says he likes his superheroes with a touch of soap opera – and with a Royal Family in the mix in the Inhumans, the emotional stakes are even more heightened.



This page: Soule describes *Letter 44* as "*Alien* meets *House Of Cards*."

little deeper into the work. Being exclusive to one or the other world allows me to do that, and at the time, Marvel seemed like the right place to do that."

EXPANDING INHUMANS

In late 2014, Soule was charged with orchestrating his first major event book with *The Death of Wolverine*, chronicling the demise of the original Logan. The following spring, he replaced Matt Fraction on the controversial *Inhuman*, which after the worldwide dispersal of the transmutative Terrigen Mists greatly expanded the reclusive superhuman race's roster beyond the existing members of the Royal Family. The book elevated them to become major players in the Marvel Universe – though their increased profile hasn't been warmly greeted by all fans. Soule, however, insists that their inherent weirdness and formidable capabilities are what makes them so appealing.

"Black Bolt is one of the most powerful characters in the Marvel universe, and Medusa isn't very far behind," says Soule, who is continuing on *Uncanny Inhumans* but will be replaced on *All-New Inhumans* by his current co-

This page: Soule's second series in the *Star Wars* universe focuses on the relationship between the Jedi master and his fiery young padawan.

writer James Asmus in May. "It's also great working with characters who have such a kind of stately regality to them. And the set-up of *Uncanny Inhumans* means that there are now many more Inhumans, who are brand new to having superpowers, popping up all over the world. There are literally thousands of new stories that can be told."

WRITER WITHOUT FEAR

While he has been afforded an almost blank canvas with *Uncanny Inhumans*, Soule has the more daunting prospect of following on from Mark Waid, Chris Samnee and Paolo Riviera's massively popular, multi Eisner award winning run on *Daredevil*, which he and artist Ron Garney took on late last year.

"It's a little nerve-wracking and a bit intimidating," he says. "I felt similarly when I took over *Swamp Thing* from Scott Snyder. But the difference now is that when I took over *Swamp Thing* I was essentially nobody, so I really had very little to lose. And [Daredevil] is a character that I love very much, and many other people also love him very much, so if I tank on *Daredevil*, it will be a bit weird. It's a book that people sort of assume will be a good book, so it's not been that easy for

> "WHEN I TOOK OVER SWAMP THING, I WAS NOBODY, SO I HAD VERY LITTLE TO LOSE"

me, as it still has to be exceptional in some way."

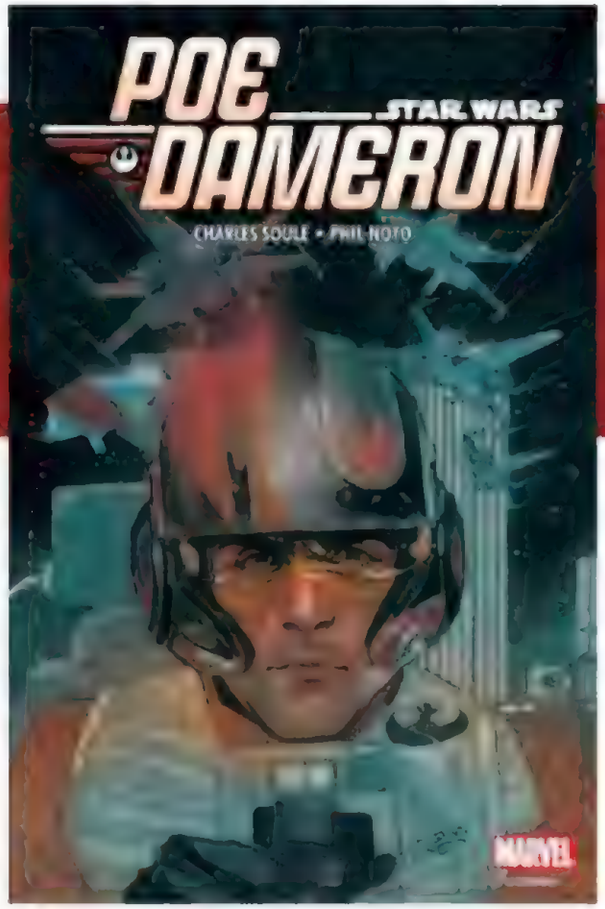
But with Brian Michael Bendis, Alex Maleev, Ed Brubaker, Michael Lark and Andy Diggle all having enjoyed memorable turns on The Man Without Fear's monthly adventures in the past 15 years – not to mention Frank Miller's seminal reinvention in the late '70s and early '80s – Soule was always going to have some big boots to fill. "The Miller stuff is definitely very inspirational to me," he says. "But beyond that, I really need to make it mine, so my *Daredevil* is a synthesis of all the runs, including Mark Waid and Chris Samnee's, so you'll see little touches of them all, and the frosting on top is kind of my take."

Soule is possibly the only qualified lawyer ever to script *Daredevil*, giving him a valuable insight into Matt Murdock's official profession, something that he also did with *She-Hulk*, although on this occasion he'll be examining the legal profession from the other side of the desk. "The *She-Hulk* version of lawyering was kind of a start-up, where you're just starting a practice and you're trying to get clients," he explains. "Daredevil will now be a district attorney, which is a part of the American justice system where you're bringing in criminals, trying them and sending them off to jail. It's almost like his day job is now aligned with his night job for the first time."

Soule's legal work has also provided him with some valuable insight into the life of Daredevil's new sidekick, Blindspot. An illegal Chinese immigrant, Samuel Chung used his lowly job as a janitor at New York's Columbia University to fashion the invisibility suit that he dons to patrol the streets of Chinatown. "A big part of my original pitch for *Daredevil* was that he would have his own Robin, to use a Batman analogy," Soule says. "But I wanted him to feel like somebody who wasn't necessarily a little kid. I wanted him to have his own agenda, and to feel like a real person. Also, the area of law that I predominantly practise is immigration law, so Sam is what in American legal terms we call an undocumented immigrant."

LIVING IN GREY AREAS

Brought over to America at a young age by his parents, Sam cannot get permanent residency, meaning that he has no access to hospital care and other such facilities. "He's in this strange grey zone, where he's been to school and he's very skilled and smart, but there are elements of society that are completely closed off to him because of choices that were made when he was a little kid but were not his own," explains Soule. "I thought it was a fascinating angle for a superhero character I've never seen done before, and it's something I can write about with some authority because of the work I've been doing on the law side."



This page: *Poe Dameron* is Marvel's first series set in the timeline of the new trilogy – and it's all going to be canon!

Returning Daredevil to his native New York after his sojourn in San Francisco during Waid and Samnee's tenure, Soule was determined to show a different side of the Big Apple with the story shifting from Matt's usual Hell's Kitchen stomping ground to nearby Chinatown. "I've lived in New York for 18 years now and I love Chinatown," says Soule. "We've seen a lot of Daredevil stories in Hell's Kitchen and there's been stories set in Chinatown too. But with Blindspot, we have a character that sees Chinatown in the same way that Daredevil sees Hell's Kitchen. Also, Matt's new office is just south of Chinatown, so I suppose we've gone downtown a bit, but it's all fun."

"AT SOME POINT, THE STUDENT IS GOING TO LEAVE THE MASTER"

Noting that he carefully avoided catching any episodes of the Netflix *Daredevil* series until after he had completed his first couple of issues, Soule is clearly determined to follow his own creative path. However, he is also penning a four-issue *Daredevil/Punisher* series for artist Szymon Kudranski, which will be published in May not long after Frank Castle makes his small-screen debut in *Daredevil*'s just-released second season. "I wanted to get my take locked first, as I didn't want the TV series to influence what I was doing in any way," he says. "It was important to me that it was my *Daredevil* instead of a mish-mash of the show. But now I've seen how great it is, I'm encouraged because people who come to my book from the show will not find it to be a completely foreign experience, as it feels like an evolution of the *Daredevil* that we've seen on the show."

UNEXPLORED TERRITORY

As with Daredevil and Blindspot, there's a master/apprentice dynamic running through *Obi Wan & Anakin*, Soule's second *Star Wars* limited-series (following the well-received *Lando* in 2015). "Teacher/student relationships are always very powerful, with lots of conflicting emotions," he says of the mini-series, which is drawn by *Star Wars: Shattered Empire*'s Marco Checchetto.

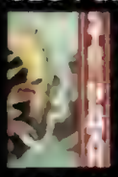
"At some point, the student is going to leave the master, so did the master do a good enough job training the student?" he continues. "Will they turn on each other, or be friends forever? In the story, Anakin is still a student in the Jedi temple, and he's about 13 or 14, so he's been studying for most of that time and Obi Wan has been teaching and training him.

"It's a time where they've been doing it for long enough that they have both started to ask some questions of the other. Anakin is a young teen, and teenagers always question authority and what's going around them in a way that they haven't before. And hopefully it feels real in a way – like a real kid with real emotions."

Taking place between *The Phantom Menace* and *Attack Of The Clones*, *Obi Wan & Anakin* has allowed Soule to explore a period that is "largely unexplored territory" in Disney's new *Star*

CHARLES SOULE: BEYOND THE HITS

STRONGMAN (2009)
SLG Publishing



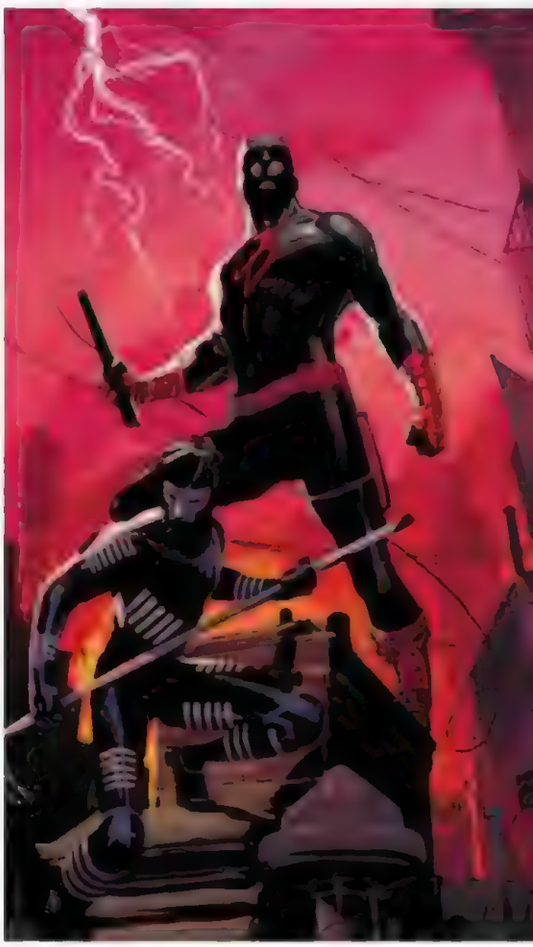
An original graphic novel, drawn by Allen Gladfelter. Tigre used to be huge on the Mexican wrestling scene, but that was a long time ago. Now washed up and living in New York, he is offered an unlikely shot at redemption when he's drawn into the mystery surrounding an organ trafficking ring. A sequel, *Strongman: Oaxaca Tapout*, followed in 2014.

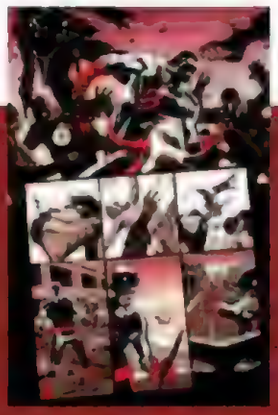
TWENTY-SEVEN (2010-2011)
Image

A four-issue series drawn by Renzo Podesta and W Scott Forbes. Rock star Will Garland turns 27 and fears he may be fated to follow in the footsteps of other stars who died at that age. An exploration of creativity, numerology and mortality, the series riffs on Soule's own history as a musician. A second four-issue series followed in 2011.

STRANGE ATTRACTORS (2012-2013)
Archaia Studios Press

A five-issue limited series drawn by Greg Scott. Heller Wilson is a student who discovers that one of his professors has secretly been helping save the world, working behind the scenes by using the butterfly effect. An idiosyncratic science fiction thriller based around chaos theory.





Wars continuity. "As far as I know, this is the only story set in that time," says Soule. "There might have been novelisations in the past but those might not be part of the new canon [Disney consined established *Star Wars* spinoff lore to "legend" status when it took over the franchise – Ed]. So it's neat to know that I can make stuff up about that period, particularly with people like Palpatine starting to make his moves. There are stories that are set up with flashbacks while the main story is partly set in a steampunk, almost *Mad Max* sort of world and in and around the Jedi temple on Coruscant."

FEELING THE FORCE

Rather than the late Alec Guinness, who played the older Obi Wan Kenobi in the original trilogy, Soule is basing his portrayal of the leading Jedi master on Ewan McGregor's performance in the prequel films. "I very much liked what he did in some parts of *Attack Of The Clones*, where he goes off by himself, investigating things," he says. "That influenced my take a lot as well as samurai movies like Akira Kurasawa's *Seven Samurai*. He doesn't talk a lot, which is sort of by design, because Anakin is more of a chatterbox."

Obi Wan & Anakin isn't the last we'll see of Soule in the *Star Wars* universe. April sees the launch of an ongoing book focusing on hotshot Resistance fighter pilot Poe Dameron, set just prior to the events of *The Force Awakens*. "I'm having a blast," admits Soule. The *Poe Dameron* book is another first for Marvel, marking its first tale set in the timeline of the new trilogy. And, like all of the comics now released since Disney took control of the venerable franchise, the events are considered canon.

"Like many of us, I've been a big *Star Wars* fan since I was a little kid," Soule continues. "So the idea that the stories that I'm telling are considered part of those characters' real canon is remarkable."

But it isn't all X-Wing Fighters and billy clubs for Soule, who is entering the home strait on *Letter 44*, which started its fourth arc, "Saviors", with #22 in January. "We're gearing up for the endgame, which makes me sad," says Soule. "The series will end with #35, which will come out around the same time as the next US President takes office, which makes for a nice kind of circle as the series started with a new President taking office. It's hard in today's market to get a series that will go for a long time – often they end around the ninth or tenth issues. So it's fantastic to know *Letter 44* will go the distance and I'll get to tell the story exactly as I intended. It just means that I need to get some more creator-owned stuff out into the world, which is something I'm working very hard on right now."

This page and opposite: Drawing on the popular Netflix series and the equally popular recent incarnations of the character in the comics, Daredevil continues to evolve... But will giving him a sidekick prove to be a step too far?

SHOCK AND AWE

WATCH OUT, MARVEL – NEW KID AFTERSHOCK IS ON THE BLOCK, AS **DAVID BARNETT** DISCOVERS

The eve of the world premiere of the second *Avengers* movie, *Age Of Ultron*, might not seem the most auspicious timing for announcing you're walking away from the all-conquering Marvel juggernaut.

But that's exactly what Marvel Comics executive editor Mike Marts did a year ago… to join a brand new comics company, AfterShock, in collaboration with Joe Pruett, an editor, publisher and former Marvel writer himself.

History might be littered with breakaway companies who thought they could replicate the success of the House of Ideas – anyone with long memories and extensive 1970s comic collections will remember Atlas – but AfterShock was determined from the get-go not to be a footnote in comics history. Announcing themselves to the world, they described the start-up as "a hybrid comic book company combining the creative edge of an independent comic book publisher with the strengths and experience of a traditional powerhouse".

With top talent including Brian Azzarello, Marguerite Bennett, Garth Ennis, Ray Fawkes, Adam Glass and Sam Kieth lining up to ink deals with the

In *Super Zero*, a teenage girl hopes to become a superhero – but things don't go according to plan...

"THE IDEA OF AFTERSHOCK BEGAN TO FORM ABOUT 15 YEARS AGO"

Sinister goings on in horror comic *Black Eyed Kids*...

fledgling publisher, it was clear that AfterShock was training its guns on the big time.

One year on, AfterShock has its first wave of titles out in the world – among them *American Monster*, by Azzarello and Juan Doe, about a disfigured stranger who washes up in a small town; Bennett and Ariela Kristantina's erotically-charged Victorian horror-fantasy *InSEXts*; David Hine and Alberto Ponticelli's serial killer thriller *Second Sight*, and *Dreaming Eagles*, the true story of the US Air Force's first African-American pilots, from Garth Ennis, Simon Coleby and Francesco Francavilla.

It almost seems like AfterShock has emerged fully-formed into the comics landscape... but it's been a long time fermenting, says Pruett.

"I guess you could really say that the idea of AfterShock started to form about 15 years ago after I left my position of creative director at Caliber Comics," he says. "I spent a few years working solely as a freelance writer, meeting Mike Marts while I was a writer on the X-Men family of titles at Marvel, before realising how much I enjoyed working with creators on their 'passion projects', as I had at Caliber."

As a result of that, Pruett set up Desperado Publishing, partnering first with Image and then IDW. He says, "Desperado was my version of Caliber Comics, a home for creators to come and produce their personal visions. As my contract with IDW was set to expire, and Desperado started to fade away, I started working with a few 'name' creators with the idea of forming another Image-type comic company, one owned and operated by the comic creators themselves.

It was around this time that I reached out to Lee Kramer [now AfterShock's President], about potentially helping to

American Monster sees a disfigured stranger upset the locals of a small town.

raise the financing needed to get the company up and running. Lee and I had met a few years earlier when the company he was working with was interested in bringing one of my Caliber comic series, *KILROY IS HERE*, to film. We had hit it off and had mutual interests, so a bond and a friendship was formed naturally. After a couple of go-arounds with the creator company, it fizzled and we both moved on to other things. After about a two-year absence, Lee reached back to out to me with a new opportunity to get another version of a comic company up and started, so we started brainstorming again and AfterShock is the result of that fateful phone call."

All that was then required was to bring Mike Marts on board... but as executive editor at Marvel, and with DC writing credits under his belt, surely it was a big risk to leave the established order for something new and untested?

"Not in the least," says Marts firmly. "My entire career has led to this. The great opportunities I was given at both Marvel and DC have always been leading to this... to the building of a new company... the construction of the next wave of comic book storytelling."

CROWDED MARKET

Of course, we live in the Image Era as much as the Marvel Age, where creator-owned titles, risk-taking and many and varied challenges to the market-share of the Big Two are commonplace. So what sets AfterShock apart?

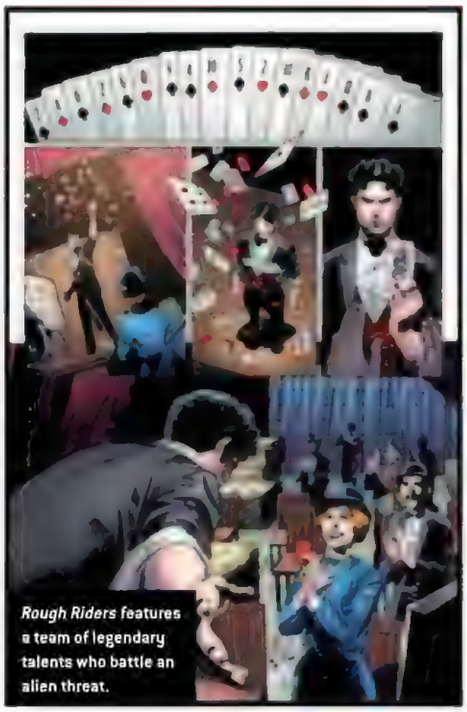
"We focus on several main pillars in constructing the AfterShock brand," says Marts, "[and we] recruit top level talent to tell their best stories in unique ways. Story needs to come first, then quality, then taking intelligent risks. We're creator-owned, creator-driven, creator-friendly. We're not concerned about market share or title count – just in making the best, highest-quality comic books on the stands."

Taking risks and creative freedom is very much a part of Pruett's DNA, and never more apparent in his pet project *Negative Burn*, which began life as an often-experimental anthology from Caliber in 1993, finding homes at Image and then Desperado before the latter folded. It's that ethos that Pruett is definitely bringing to AfterShock.

He says, "*Negative Burn* was what put me on the map. I had the incredible luck to not only work with, what was at that time and probably still true today, some of comics' top talents – Alan Moore, Neil Gaiman, Brian Bolland – but got to work with some of the top up-and-comers of that day... John Cassaday, Paul Pope, Terry Moore, Mike Perkins, Warren Ellis, Paul Jenkins, Phil Hester.

"It was gruelling putting together 50 issues of *Negative Burn*, but it was the best experience of my life. I've taken that same philosophy of working with the best of the day and the best of tomorrow throughout my career and continue to do so with AfterShock. One eye on the present and one on the future."

Of course, the break of the stranglehold of Marvel and DC on the comics scene



Rough Riders features a team of legendary talents who battle an alien threat.

Dreaming Eagles tells the true-life tale of the first African-American pilots in the US Air Force.

also brings with it fresh challenges, especially for a new publisher. The comics business has rarely had so many companies vying for our attention and money, and the rise of self-publishing, both digitally and in print, is bringing even more product to the market. Those challenges are, says Marts, the "usual ones" any publisher faces: "Spreading the gospel of the company, making sure the masses know what high-quality product we have, so they can properly experience it." He adds. "It's a challenge, for sure, but it's been one exciting challenge to tackle. Our team continually dreams up new ways of spreading the message and getting more people to encounter our company."

What separates AfterShock from the rest, says Marts, is the talent they've attracted. So why are such hot creators queueing up to work for the company? "Diversity of talent and genre is an important part of what makes Aftershock books unique," he says, "but the core quality that separates Aftershock from everyone else are the unique stories that our fantastic creative line-up brings to the table.

"We're creator-owned, creator-driven and creator-friendly. We put the creator first, as they deserve. Plus, the majority of the creators we work with are relationships that Joe and I have established over years of working within the industry. It's great to be working again with old friends."

And yet more names continue to be linked with AfterShock… Nick Pitarra, Wilfredo Torres, Ales Kot among them. What projects are they going to be working on?

> **"WE PUT THE CREATOR FIRST, AS THEY DESERVE"**

"Stay tuned," says Marts, playing his cards close to his chest. "Some will be providing new series, some will be working on beautiful covers… others will be tackling the art chores on exciting new projects. But no matter who they are, everyone will be bringing their A-game to AfterShock."

And while established names are continually adding to the AfterShock roster, Marts also hints that in the future the company will be looking to nurture and bring on new, undiscovered talent.

In the meantime, though, the AfterShock team are basking in a wholly satisfying entry into the comics scene, establishing themselves on the online portal Comixology as well as with hard copies in comic stores.

Marvel and DC, of course, continue to do their thing, both in the comics and in the multiplexes. Between the releases of *Avengers: Age Of Ultron* and *Captain America: Civil War*, Mike Marts has left Marvel behind… and has no regrets at all. That's not to say the lure of the box office won't come, though… when AfterShock was unveiled in April 2015, movie industry news site Deadline suggested that "Hollywood studios should be drooling" at the new company's line-up.

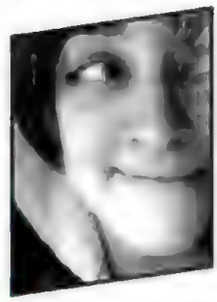
For now, though, it's all about the comics. AfterShock has one mission for the rest of 2016, says Marts, and that is very simple: "For our brand to be synonymous with high quality comic books," he says.

And on the basis of what the company has already released and what's lined up ready to come out, it would seem to be mission accomplished.

Rat Queens is a labour of love for its artist, who was a fan from the start
TESS 2015

THE ART OF TESS FOWLER

RAT QUEENS ARTIST **TESS FOWLER** TELLS STEPHEN KELLY WHY DRAWING THE IMAGE SERIES IS SUCH A SPECIAL EXPERIENCE



One of Tess Fowler's biggest inspirations is Kevin Smith's 1997 film *Chasing Amy*, which centres on two comic book artists. "It sounds weird," she says, "but it's because there's a scene where Smith takes the camera to a convention and, lo and behold, there are girls there! There's a girl on the panel! And it just never clicked for me until then that I might be welcome, that there might be a real spot for me in comic books."

It's fitting, then, that Fowler got her first real break at San Diego Comic Con in 2004, where she worked as an artist on the *Heavy Metal* magazine booth at the request of editor and co-creator of *Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles* Kevin Eastman. And even more fitting that, 11 years later, she would start drawing on Kurtis J. Wiebe's *Rat Queens*, the darkly comic fantasy series that stars four rowdy, foul-mouthed maidens-for-hire: Hannah the rockabilly Elven mage, Violet the hipster Dwarven fighter, Dee the atheist human Cleric and Betty the hippie Smidgen thief. Published by Image Comics, it's not only a realistic, well-rounded portrayal of women, but is driven by art that is fun, frantic and exciting.

As Fowler puts the finishing touches to *Rat Queens* Volume Three, she sat down to talk art, diversity and why she'll always have a soft spot for halfling Betty.

COMIC HEROES: It's been a year since you took over *Rat Queens* from artist Roc Upchurch and, later, Stjepan Šejić. How have you found working on the series so far?

TESS FOWLER: It's been great, but challenging. I've been working with Kurtis on and off since about 2014. He's my favourite person I love to hate because I adore his work, I adore his writing, but I hate it because every time he throws me a script, I have to work on it. Its something that haunts me, it keeps me up at night. And when he invited me to work on *Rat Queens* it was already a property I loved, it was already a property I collected and drew fan art for.

It's so weird because [working with Kurtis] is extremely easy in the sense that he knows me and he will throw me

> KURTIS WRITES LIKE HE'S INSIDE MY HEAD. I'VE NEVER EXPERIENCED A COMIC LIKE THAT, A BOOK LIKE THAT, OR A MOVIE LIKE THAT, REALLY

everything I like. But at the same time he will also give me panels of, "Oh by the way, this room is crowded with people, fighting and drinking..." And I'm like "Oh great." And he'll joke saying, "Oh this panel takes two minutes!" and it takes me a week. But I would draw anything for him. I got sick last year working on *Rat Queens*. I have suffered, lost sleep, I don't care. And that's a working relationship that is very rare in comics. Or anywhere.

CH: What was it that made you a fan of *Rat Queens* in the first place?

TF: Kurtis' writing. The way he writes the characters as outcasts. These are the outcast women of society who have been outcast from their respective tribes, sometimes left on the side of the road, often abused, and all from very different, beautiful, crazy backgrounds, and somehow [they] all came together in friendship to be mercenaries. It sounds so awful, but most men, at least in my experience, in entertainment, can't get inside a woman's head like that. They can do a fair attempt of it, but Kurtis writes like he's inside my head. I've never experienced a comic like that, a book like that, or a movie like that, really.

CH: Was it strange to continue the work of another artist?

TF: I was fan of Roc's work before I came on the series. Roc and I have a lot of the same fundamentals when it comes to drawing women, so picking this up and running with it wasn't as difficult as it might have been had I been working on, say, *Spider-Man*. It was fairly easy especially since he and Steven hadn't really had time to fully flesh the girls out. So I got to come in and pick up from where they started.

CH: Was there anything you wanted to develop or move on?

TF: For me, as a reader and as a storyteller, there was a bit missing. Just some musical notes missing in the way that they moved and in their heights. That was a big one. The way they would look down at Betty. Sometimes, depending on the panel, she'd be a little taller, a little broader, a little shorter, and I just wanted some consistency in the way they related to each other. There's a thing with Charlotte where she tends to always push her

Betty has a relentlessly cheery outlook and a fondness for hallucinogens

The lavish detail in the market includes a wealth of personal resonance

hair behind her ears when she's nervous. There's also something with Dee where she's always got a certain stance when she's frustrated. They all have something little that a reader may not notice at first, but it kinda sets the music of the character's movement.

CH: Is there a character that you particularly struggle with?

TF: Hannah was very, very hard for me and I think I really only came close to capturing her in the final issue of Volume Three. I don't know why. It could possibly be because she reminds me of a couple of people I know. She's very complex, very emotional and very volatile. And I felt like a lot of times I didn't give her enough. Maybe it's just me.

CH: Let's talk about your favourite pieces of art. Why did you choose the panel with Betty at the market?

TF: The market is my favourite panel in all of *Rat Queens*, because that was the moment where I felt like the series was finally mine. What you're looking at there, that's my strength. All of that, rolled up into one panel. There's just so much love in that panel. The fairies in the bottles? Something I've drawn since I was so young. On the left, of course, is me and my cat, talking to a local deli owner who has seen us through many, many years of hardship. My colourist Tamra [Bonvillain] is also in the back carrying a basket of paint. There's just so much me in that panel.

CH: I take it that you're specifically a fan of Betty too?

TF: Betty, out of all of them, reminds me the most of me. If you just boiled me down to my basics, it's Betty. She was the character in the book originally that I was ›

BLACK
SPIDER
TESS 2015

> "I DO THINK THAT COMICS HAVE THE OPPORTUNITY TO LEAD THE CHARGE WHEN IT COMES TO CREATING OPPORTUNITIES FOR MORE DIVERSE CREATORS"

drawn to the least, which is strange. But I realised as I've been working with her, she very much feels to me the most vulnerable parts of me. It happened so organically. So every time I go to draw her, my heart is really in it.

CH: You also sent over two black-and-white fan-art drawings. Why did you choose these?

TF: I sent you a drawing of Mary Fields, also known as Stagecoach Mary. She was the first African-American mail carrier in the United States, and is the one person in history who I feel like there should be movies, there should be comics, there should be everything – she's just a wicked badass! It's also a much cleaner style for me. I started doing that after I started working with Kurtis. I had to get a lot quicker, a lot more efficient with my inking.

CH: And how about the one of Black Canary and Spider-Gwen rocking out?

TF: I've been out of the loop of [Marvel and DC Comics] for years and years. But when Black Canary and Spider-Gwen were announced, I was so delighted because for all of my life, girls just weren't welcome. And over the past couple of years I've been advocating for throwing open the doors and welcoming not only women but those of different races, LGBTQ. And all of a sudden, with the announcement of the new Black Canary series and Spider-Gwen, it felt like suddenly it was beginning to happen. And I was so wicked-passionate about it that I went and drew that piece. I was a die-hard Green Arrow fan as a kid. So, if you look at the piece, Canary has a little nod to Oliver Queen. So that piece is wrapped up in all of my girl power emotions! It's so angry and yet so powerful. I adore it.

CH: Characters in comics do seem to be getting more diverse, but it still seems to be lacking when it comes to actual creators.

TF: Well that's not only comics. Diversity is very much… missing! Absent! I have very strong views about the fact I work in an industry and live in a country of straight white American men. I do think things are starting to change but not fast enough for me. It's not that hard [to employ more diverse creators]. It's really not. I think we're going to see a lot of changes in the near future, but they won't be enough. America needs to change, and I don't think its going to happen because the status quo has been this way for way too long.

I do think that comics have the opportunity to lead the charge when it comes to creating opportunities for more diverse creators. I view comics as an art-form, as ground-breaking. And I think that right now, especially in the States, there is a chance that is being missed. And if the white men in positions of power could make different choices, could open up their eyes, then in our little world of comics, which is so tight-knit and so close, I think we could create the chink in the armour. We could bring it all tumbling home, man!

CH: As the audience for comics broadens too, diversifying creators seems like a no-brainer, doesn't it?

TF: Yeah. The internet has brought us together. The internet has opened up so many pathways of communication, and it's honestly really sad to watch these people do the same things over and over again hoping for different results. If you follow me on Twitter, I tend to do this thing where I'll be like, "OK send me new voices" and I will get hundreds. So I'll retweet them and it's unbelievable what talent is out there not being tapped. It's crazy, unbelievable. And it's from every genre. Creators from every kind of background. It's amazing. And if only the professional side of comics, mainstream comics, looked more like that.

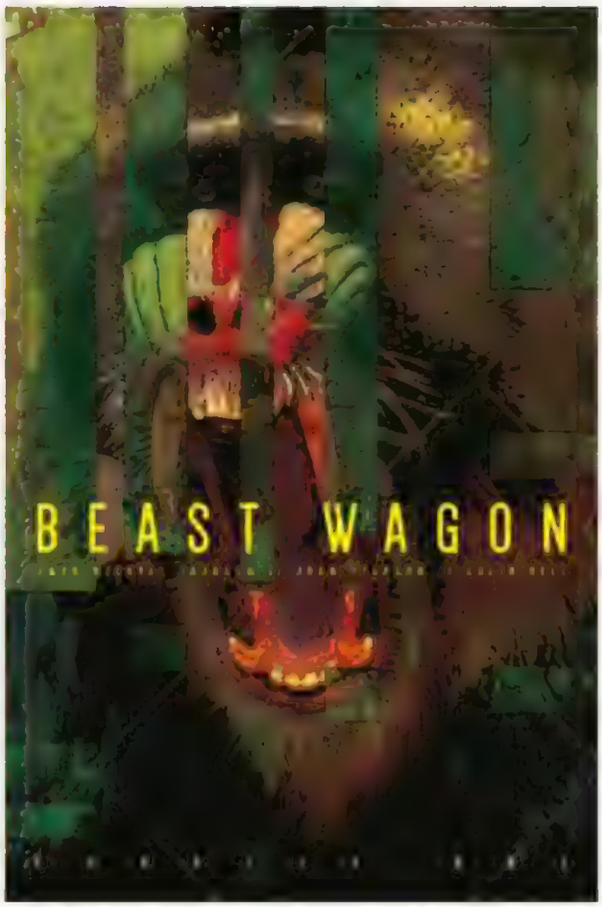
CH: Do you think change will come, at least, on a generational scale?

TF: I'm an American so I'm going to say no. Not here. We're not built for it. We're not raised that way. We get these random, beautiful free-thinkers, but in America they're murdered. We don't like that here in America. I know I sound terrible for saying that, but we don't. Comics is no different. Music is no different. We have beautiful youth. Wonderful creators. But I don't know. Maybe I sound like a cynical, terrible person but look at how many beautiful wonderful free-thinkers we had in the '60s, and look what we did for them.

IMAGES © 2016 TESS FOWLER AND IMAGE COMICS

ANIMAL MAGIC

OWEN JOHNSON AND JOHN PEARSON TELL STEPHEN JEWELL HOW THEY GUIDED BEAST WAGON FROM KICKSTARTER TO COMICS STORE



Owen Michael Johnson knew that John Pearson was the perfect choice to illustrate his new self-published comic book *Beast Wagon* after seeing Pearson's unusual choice of materials for the *Manson Family Triptych*, his collaborative contribution with artist PM Buchan to 2014 exhibition *Cult* at London's Orbital Comics. "I finished it in gold ink and hand-painted it in pig's blood," recalls Pearson. "That was my introduction to everybody, and we met there and hit it off."

"I just looked at that and thought 'That's the guy for me'," laugh Johnson. "It was like love at first sight. I'd had the idea for *Beast Wagon* kicking around as a very different, much tamer sort of book. Then I met John, and that gave it a real sense of focus. I'd just moved down to London from the wild expanses of the Lake District, and everything down here was so intense, which informed the way I thought the project was going to go. So I gave John a call and said 'Can you draw fast, and can you draw animals?' I wanted *One Flew Over The Cuckoo's Nest* with talking animals. And he just said yes, and it kind of went from there."

An apocalyptically-themed ecological drama, *Beast Wagon* had "a low key release" at Leeds' Thought Bubble convention in 2014 in the form of an ashcan, composed of a six-page preview of the first issue combined with a map of its fictional setting, the appropriately-named Whipsnarl Zoo. But without the benefit of a conventional distributor such as Diamond, Johnson and Pearson turned to Kickstarter, quickly raising enough funds to produce not just the first issue but the second as well.

"We were working on the series, and knew that we wanted to do a mini-series, so we were looking into how to go about financing it, which is always difficult with independent work," says Johnson. "It's never easy to keep the series on the rails without bankrupting yourself, so we decided that Kickstarter was the way to go. I'd never done it before and had heard horror stories, so wasn't sure about crowdfunding. But now having done it, we wouldn't be here without the support of everybody. That really made it happen."

Having released *Beast Wagon* #1 >

THIS PAGE: *Beast Wagon* combines striking y naturalistic art with an unsett ing edge and a w cked sense of humour

in May and #2 in November 2015, Johnson and Pearson were able to use the proceeds from the first two issues to publish the third in February 2016, which they marked with a signing at Gosh Comics the afternoon after our meeting at an East London café. "The intention is that the sales of each issue will fund the next one," says Pearson. "We're now halfway through the story, so it's like so far, so good."

"We were concerned as well about reader burnout, if we tried to Kickstart every single issue," adds Johnson. "We were confident that we could get the product to people if they Kickstarted us, and then we could manage the rest by ourselves. We're very conscious of not asking people to keep supporting us, but maybe we will do again for a different project down the line. Kickstarter was like a jump-start that allowed us to start out by building as much of an audience as we could, and we're now going to keep it going with hard work."

EVOLUTION

"The whole thing has evolved naturally, and can continue to evolve as we build in other aspects of where we want to go with it, or whatever influences come along," says Johnson. "Being open to those kinds of things has really helped the book."

While the story is set in a zoo, Johnson insists that the location isn't the main focal point of the story. "It's more about an interest in animals," he says. "I think everyone has a latent interest in animals because they can't speak to us. They're unknowable, and that's the key thing with anthropomorphic books – there's a perverse interest in knowing what they're thinking."

The pair even took a research trip to London Zoo, although they were more intent on watching people view the animals than looking at the animals themselves. "I recited an incantation before we went in to give us a boost in the right areas," adds Johnson, who performed a chaos magic spell that he'd designed himself. "Nobody goes to the zoo to watch people, so we found ourselves being generally ignored, which was wonderful, being able to observe those interactions. We definitely got the sense that we were invisible."

Before "Disney made them goo-goo-eyed plush toys," Johnson says, "we used to see animals as 'other,' as they were different from us and they had a certain power over our minds. The mythology strand was a way of exploring that through the character of Patrick, a writer who feels he's not doing what he wants to do. He's pretty dissatisfied, which is a situation that many of the other human characters are also in. Whether it's through their perversions, their jobs or the places they've found themselves in at the zoo, they feel trapped. Patrick is no exception: he is trying to find a more spiritual place for himself, and it just so happens that he takes acid at the zoo and gets more than he bargained for."

"Each day he calls forth a mighty audience-- the impressionable young--and there, in his arena of lies, he spews the oily filth of his preachings into ignorant ears.
"The scum paints his racist face in mockery of our crippled families. He paints the faces of his disciples. The Heretic even depicts the Prophet."

ABOVE: It's about the people as well as the animals, but even more about the way the two perceive each other

BELOW There are dark hints of a coming uprising repeatedly subverted by humour

While Johnson is responsible mainly for the script and Pearson the art, the pair have collaborated as closely as they can, also involving letterer Colin Bell in the story's initial genesis. "It's been like that right from the start, when

Death to the furless dictators! Stoke the fire!
But who is the poison at the heart? The head of this Hydra? The eater of worlds! The despot absolute calls himself--
Stokely defier!
Stoke the fire!

we first spoke about how it should develop," says Pearson. "Owen then wrote the script, which he gave to me and Colin, so we all have opinions about the direction we want it to take. And because there are so many avenues to explore, it has changed slightly with some different approaches. The main arc of the story was always going to be the same, but it's nice how we can all work together to influence the direction of things. Then once the artwork is done, that will go back to Owen and he might do some tweaks."

Johnson continues: "Basically, me, John and Colin talked about the story at the start, so we've always known where it was going. But once everyone had agreed that it was really solid, I went away and wrote a full script, as I like to control the pacing and the build-up of tension. That's especially important in the third issue, where things are reaching crisis point, so it was important to have everything laid out for the sake of clarity. At that point, it goes to John to read, and we will then talk about it again. John will make corrections or suggestions, I'll redraft and from there we get the final script."

EDUCATION

Beast Wagon is the first comics work by Pearson, a professional artist who has worked for various magazines, music companies and museums. "The majority of my stuff now is predominantly digital," he says. "With the artwork, it will be a case of thumbnailing it out and then emailing it to Owen before going over it and seeing what works or not. It'll be a lot of hand-drawn linework scanned digitally and that seems to be working well so far. It can be a lengthy process, but it's always developing, as I've never done a comic book before, so it's been a big learning curve for me."

Helped by the sharp printing and high quality paper, Pearson's evocative colours are an essential part of the storytelling, conveying emotions or mood. "It's crucial for getting that uneasy feel in certain elements of the art, with the kind of surreal, uncanny stuff," he says. "It's also a means of building the story through the artwork, as it gets richer or more sickly. It's massively important, but for me as an artist, it's about developing as well and trying out different things."

Having previously published

ABOVE: It's a day in the life of the zoo, basically – but not an ordinary day. Apart from the heat, there's something apocalyptic in the air

SHORT STORIES

Expanding the universe...

Viewing them as "chapter breaks," Johnson has also written a series of short stories set in the *Beast Wagon* universe, which are being published between issues. "They're really, really fun," he says. "They're intended as canon, as they essentially function as single pieces on their own but they also tie in with the main narrative. It's mentioned throughout *Beast Wagon* that Shaman is gifted with second sight, where he can see incidents across the globe of human/animal interaction, which are only mentioned in passing the main series itself, as we didn't have enough space."

While Martin Simmonds (*Death Sentence: London*) and Pearson himself have drawn previous instalments, the latest episode – published in this very issue of *Comic Heroes* – is illustrated by Jay Gunn, who conjured up some memorable sea monsters of his own in his recent Titan Comics series *Surface Tension*. "The script stipulated two 'beasts,' an orca and a Marilyn Manson-type fan," says Gunn. "I did a little research into captive orcas and was disgusted to see the wounds of captivity that one orca had suffered, so I incorporated that in the details of the animal's lower jaw."

Johnson's *Reel Love* series under his own Dogooder Comics imprint, Colin Bell was "privy to some of the early rumblings that would become *Beast Wagon*" even before Pearson came on board. Bell wrote *Dungeon Fun* for artist Neil Slorance and worked as a letterer for companies such as Image, Dark Horse and Titan, and welcomed the opportunity of more involvement in *Beast Wagon*'s development.

"It's beneficial to the medium, as I certainly treat the letters as a full aspect of the whole project," says Bell. "By and large, it's the letterer's job to help guide the reader's eye from panel to panel without drawing attention to the process. So it helps, aesthetically and otherwise, if the whole creative team is on the same page, which means artists leaving room for lettering to save their work from being covered up, or ensuring that characters are placed in a manner that helps the dialogue to be read in an easy-to-follow fashion. Writers also have to be conscious of just how much dialogue can actually fit in a panel, so the cleaner everything comes together, the more enjoyable experience it is for the reader."

PERCEPTION

With the narrative alternating between the humans and animal characters, it has been Bell's responsibility to enable the reader to easily distinguish between the individual voices. "The thing that is most apparent is the different dialogue fonts, as the humans speak in CAPITALS and the animals in 'Sentence Case'," explains Bell. "There wasn't a specific direction from Owen and John to delineate the two, but I felt it was important to differentiate them, so you would understand, at the very least subconsciously, that these two groups were speaking in a manner that was separate from each other."

While he claims that he doesn't want to humanise his beastly protagonists, Johnson insists that the animals are very much aware of the people's presence at the zoo, even if the humans are unaware of how the zoo's inhabitants truly feel. "We didn't want to put words in their mouths, although that's inevitably what we've ended up doing," he says. "We very much wanted this to be a one-way conversation, and the conceit of how the languages work in *Beast Wagon* is that it's a one-way mirror. The animals understand the humans, but it's not reciprocated. Humans can't understand animal speech, and that's reflected in Colin's work with the lettering, and all those tricks that he's used to give you that sense."

ABOVE: The animals understand the humans' speech, but the humans don't understand the animals' And some animals are more alien than others

Johnson confirms that the explanation for the title "lies at the end of the story," but both he and Pearson are reluctant to reveal too many details about what to expect from *Beast Wagon*'s final three issues. "It's tricky to do that without spoiling where it's going," says Johnson. "There are so many different threads and they're all reaching flashpoint, so you're going to see how all of the tension, frustration, conflicts and relationships between the characters come to a head for better or worse. It was our intention with these threads and storylines for them to really culminate together."

The entire story takes place over a single day, with each issue

> "BEAST WAGON WAS ALWAYS GOING TO BE AN INTENSE, DARK BOOK"

occurring over the course of 60 minutes. The first issue opens at 9a.m. as the zoo staff arrive for work and the animals prepare to receive their adoring public. "It happens on what everyone thinks is a special day," teases Johnson. "There's a solar event, and it's the hottest day of the year so far, so the last issue will be 1–2pm, which is the hottest time of day, so we'll see how that affects people, and you'll get all the answers."

"The important thing is that we want to surprise people with the storytelling," adds Pearson. "So throughout it, we keep having moments of shock."

The creators cite Alan Moore, Steve Bissette and John Totleben's seminal '80s *Swamp Thing* run as "a benchmark influence in terms of intricacy and complexity," but *Beast Wagon* also evokes the spirit of Grant Morrison and Frank Quitely's *We3* and Brian K. Vaughn and Nico Henrichon's excellent *Pride of Baghdad*, both of which feature entirely animal casts. "We wanted to do something in keeping with those intense '90s Vertigo books," says Johnson. "But hopefully a fresh, modern version of that, although *Beast Wagon* was always going to be an intense, dark book."

"It would be easy to fall into the trap of just repeating things," Pearson chimes in. "We want to build on what's in place and then push it in a different direction, as otherwise it's just nostalgia."

ABOVE RIGHT: Johnson and Pearson. Our reporter is unable to confirm whether this is the cafe where he interviewed them

With the fourth issue due in the summer and the fifth and sixth issues scheduled for the end of the year, Johnson and Pearson are determined to maintain the high quality. "It's all about momentum and keeping it in people's minds," says Johnson. "The marketplace right now is very busy – crowded, even – so with an independent comic book that doesn't have distribution with Diamond, we need to keep pushing it and keeping the promotion going. I've written #4 and am halfway through the script for the #5, which is a double-sized issue. I'll be putting the final touches on that soon, and after that we're just going to keep going."

TURN OVER FOR AN EXCLUSIVE NEW BEAST WAGON SHORT STORY... >

When you were young you were torn from your natural habitat.
WE'RE MOVING TO FLORIDA.
I HATE YOU! YOU CAN'T JUST KIDNAP ME!
...UNDER-STAND WHEN YOU'RE OLDER.
You are a social creature, and you find this deeply traumatic.
PLENTY MORE FISH IN THE SEA, CHUM.
--PRODUCING VOCALS NEVER HEARD BEFORE.
HE'S GRIEVING.
FIGHT!
FIGHT!
FIGHT!
Your psychological damage births aggression.
Your trainers attempt to pacify you...to no avail.
--CAN'T CONTROL HIM!
OHMYGOD!
--GOT HER!

"It's just a phase," they say. "I know you can't see it now but one day the world will be your oyster."
They say, "You'll grow out of it...
"...because right now..."
YOU'RE JUST A BIG FISH IN A SMALL POND
WRITER: OWEN MICHAEL JOHNSON ILLUSTRATOR: JAY GIBBON LETTERER: COLLIN HELL
BEAST WAGON CREATED BY JOHN PEARSON & OWEN MICHAEL JOHNSON
JG

SUBSCRIBE TO

COMIC HEROES

SERIOUS ABOUT COMICS

ENJOYING THE RETURN OF COMIC HEROES? SAVE MONEY AND NEVER MISS AN ISSUE AGAIN!
SUBSCRIBE TODAY AND GET ALL FOUR ISSUES PER YEAR FROM AS LITTLE AS £15

CHOOSE YOUR PACKAGE

SUBSCRIBERS GET EXCLUSIVE COVERS!

PRINT

EVERY ISSUE DELIVERED TO YOUR DOOR
DAYS BEFORE IT REACHES THE SHOPS

ONLY **£25** PER YEAR

DIGITAL

INSTANT DIGITAL ACCESS ON
YOUR iOS DEVICES

ONLY **£15**
PER YEAR

GET THE COMPLETE PACKAGE

PRINT + DIGITAL

BEST VALUE

EVERY NEW ISSUE IN PRINT AND ON iOS

NEVER MISS AN ISSUE WITH DELIVERY TO YOUR DOOR AND YOUR DEVICE

ENJOY THE BIGGEST SAVING AND BEST VALUE FOR MONEY

INSTANT DIGITAL ACCESS WHEN YOU SUBSCRIBE TODAY!

ONLY **£31** PER YEAR

SUBSCRIBE TO COMIC HEROES TODAY

VISIT myfavouritemagazines.co.uk/CHSUB

TERMS AND CONDITIONS Prices and savings quoted are compared to buying full priced UK print and digital issues. You will receive 4 issues in a year. If you are dissatisfied in any way you can write to us at Future Publishing Ltd, 3 Queensbridge, The Lakes, Northampton, NN4 7BF, United Kingdom or call us on 0844 848 2852 to cancel your subscription at any time and we will refund you for all un-mailed issues. Prices correct at point of print and subject to change. For full terms and conditions please visit myfavm.ag/magterms. Offer ends 08/07/2016.

THE FIRST COMING

THE STORY OF **MARK MILLAR'S** NEVER-FINISHED, HIGHLY CONTROVERSIAL, COMICS DEBUT: **THE SAVIOUR**

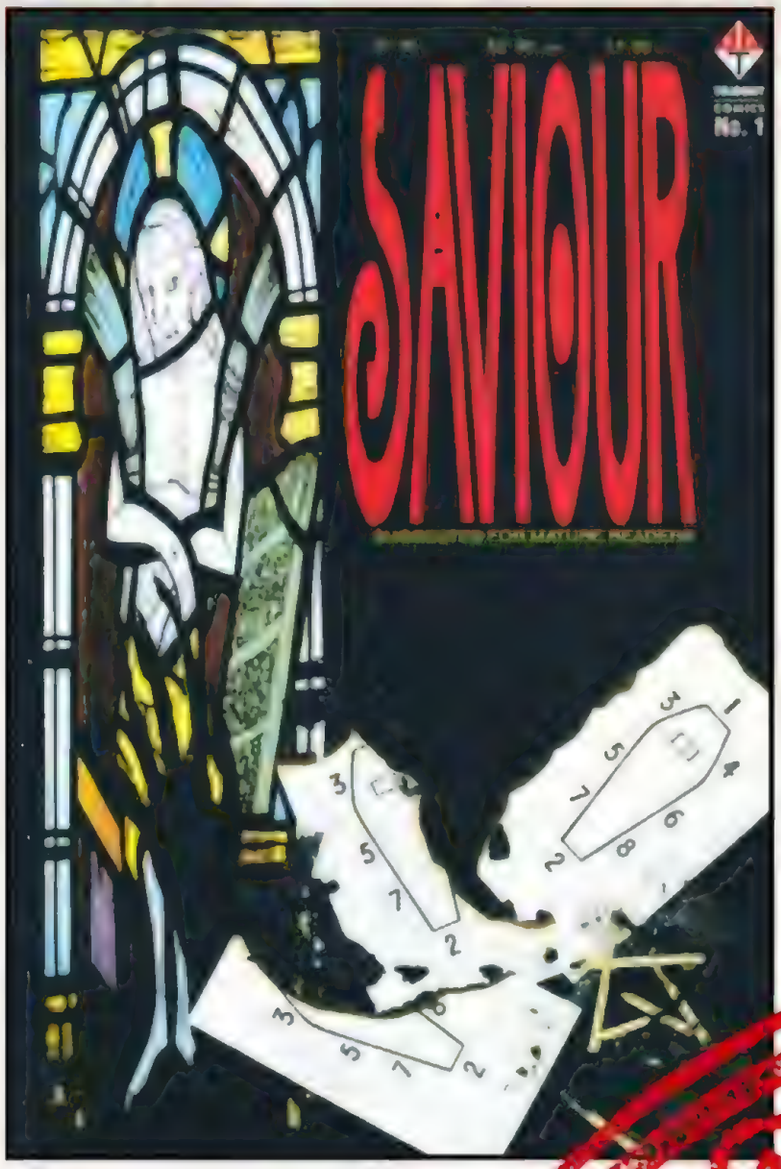
"I'm hoping for some hate mail... this one should really offend people and I'm really looking forward to it. If this doesn't work I'll just set fire to a primary school." – Mark Millar, 1989.

From the very start of his career, *Kick-Ass* creator Mark Millar had a talent for contentious one-liners. Here he was, in the pages of Trident Comics' fanzine, *Fantasy Advertiser*, previewing his debut series *The Saviour* and planning some provocative arson.

Spool back to March 1988, when Trident announced it was to launch its own comic line, to be overseen by *FA* editor Martin Skidmore. "I'm genuinely very interested in submissions," he wrote. "All will be read and considered, but only a few will be published."

Millar's proposal – *The Saviour* – was eye-catchingly bold. "A sequel to the Bible with a superhero who was also the antichrist," he says today, talking to *Comic Heroes*. "My original title was *Bible II*, and I remember thinking,

FACING PAGE: Though chaotic in style, *Saviour* showed the obvious beginnings of Millar's voice and quickly became a bestseller.



'The first one sold a lot of copies, so I'll have a bash at this.'"

He continues: "What I'm good at is coming up with a high concept. I'm never going to do a story about Doctor Octopus breaking out of prison and Peter Parker having to put him back in. That's not in my remit".

When he contacted Skidmore, Millar was still a schoolboy. "I sent in a proposal, and my first one got accepted, which was great. But it was all the sort of stuff you'd expect from a 17 or 18-year-old – although, weirdly, planting the seeds of almost everything I've ever done since."

BIG SPENDER

Issue one of *Saviour* (it didn't sport the definitive article until number three) was released on December 1989. "I got £240 a script, and I remember the money coming in. I felt like that woman who won the pools, Viv Nicholson. I went on this mad spending spree and just blew everything."

Trident's brand new comics range also featured works by Neil Gaiman, Grant Morrison, Eddie Campbell, John Ridgway and even Michael Moorcock, but *The Saviour* punched through to become its bestseller. Millar's provocative content was paying off, including the 'casting' of the eponymous, culturally-savvy fallen angel, who was depicted in the likeness of Jonathan Ross.

"In the 1980s, Jonathan was stylistically held up as the man in

ABOVE: Issue five saw the Saviour turning to a familiar method of execution.

BELOW: By issues three and four Nigel Kitching had taken over on art, with Daniel Vallely leaving due to a dislike of Millar's storytelling.

"I THINK A LOT OF US WERE COPYING THE 1980S WRITERS, GUYS WHO INSPIRED US, LIKE ALAN MOORE. AND THEY DID IT SO MUCH BETTER"

the yuppie suit and the smart haircut. The media just hung this on him. I've been friends with Jonathan for 10 years or so and I know now that, in reality, he'd be more interested in chatting to you about his favourite 1960s comic book art. He's a genuinely lovely, generous kind of guy."

By chance, Millar and Ross' paths crossed the week after issue one debuted. "I was in a comic shop in London and he was standing beside me. He obviously had no idea who I was, so I introduced myself, and said, 'I know it sounds crazy, but I've just written this comic...' And he went, 'Oh yeah, the one where I'm the antichrist? I bought a copy for my friend.'"

Daniel Vallely, who'd later go on to collaborate with Grant Morrison on *Bible John* for Fleetway's *Crisis*, illustrated the first instalment in an impressively stark style, clearly influenced by David Lloyd's work on *V For Vendetta*. But he hit problems. Although Millar understood he quit the book because he couldn't maintain a monthly schedule, when *Comic Heroes* got in touch to ask Vallely directly, he had a different response. "It's an easy question to answer," he told us, "but maybe not in line with your article. The truth is that my heart wasn't really in it."

In came Nigel Kitching, who'd drawn Neil Gaiman's *The Light Brigade* for the anthology *Trident Presents*. "Nobody thought I could do it, but I was quite pushy," Kitching tells *Comic Heroes*. "I got the gig because there was probably a lack of choice. But I wasn't really the right person for doing likenesses and so forth."

The artist – who now works as a lecturer at Teesside University – self-effacingly describes his early efforts on the title as "clunky", particularly in comparison to Vallely's atmospheric output. "But I don't think he was a great story

HE'S A GEM, THE SAVIOUR, HE REALLY IS.
DO YOU THINK IT'S TRUE, WHAT THEY SAY ABOUT HIM BEING GOD? YKNOW, BACK TO SAVE US... LIKE THE BIBLE SAID?
ANOTHER... burp.. GLASS OF WATER, PLEASE
HOW DO YOU MANAGE TO GET SMASHED ON WATER?
IT'S AN OLD TRICK.

ABOVE: Millar's original pitch was "*Bible II*", planned as a sequel.

teller," he reasons. "Even though I'm quite critical of my own work, I do think I'm good at that."

MAKING THE LEAP

Although a good deal older than Millar – Kitching was born in 1959 – the project was also a break for him. At the time he was working as a graphic designer, and illustrating comics in the evenings. "*The Saviour* was a monthly title, and that became sufficient work for me to take a chance and go freelance. It was a bit of a dangerous move, because I was married, with a mortgage, and a child, but I worked out if I turned out a page and a half of finished art a day, I could make something like a living wage. So if my artwork seemed a bit rushed, that's why."

Over the lifetime of the comic, Kitching never felt entirely comfortable. "I kind of got the impression I wasn't popular with a large part of the audience. That's maybe just my paranoia. I knew my early issues, in particular, were quite awkward. I think when I started adding the splattering tone effects, it began to look a bit more like a horror comic. That was done with masking film and a toothbrush with ink on it, which I would flick. I ended up with a permanently black left thumb."

Having spoken with Millar on the phone, at one point Kitching travelled up to Glasgow to spend a weekend with him.

"Mark was not what I expected," says Kitching. "His writing appeared very cynical and dark, and not religious at all. But he was a devout Catholic, and he seemed totally unaware that what he was doing was essentially blasphemy."

Blasphemy? Millar disagrees. "The material itself never mocked religion," he maintains. "A lot of people misinterpret that. If you think about it, the bad guy in the book is the same bad guy in the Bible. The strongest born again Christian would have struggled picking fault in it."

There was a further surprise for Kitching, when Millar took him to Mass. "It wasn't ironic, this was not Mark mocking it. This was a part of his life," he recalls.

"I was desperate to take him," explains Millar, "because I don't think he'd ever been to a church. I couldn't believe that. I grew up in [Coatbridge, east of Glasgow] a world where everybody was a Catholic. Whether you were the tough guy at school or a swot, you supported Celtic [FC] and you went to Mass on Sundays. That was just life."

Indeed, for Millar, it still is. "Oh yes, I go most Sundays, although because I've got young children, it's hard, as they're, like, embarrassing in church."

The six issues that were published of *The Saviour* tell a slightly chaotic, but heady story. The antichrist, in the guise of God's emissary, has negotiated peace talks in Northern Ireland, campaigned to end the plight of Third World poverty (making an appearance at Live Aid) and peddles a slightly patrician line about empowering communities: "Even the working class deserve a fair whack at maximising their potential". But in reality, he's throwing up the obsessions of the age ("The people of the Eighties are concerned with image and success", he muses) to mask his true intent – to destroy the real Son of God on Earth, and to track down the pages of The Book Of Azrael, which will allow him to summon the Almighty himself.

In the telling of the tale, Millar plays with a variety of provocative topics – infanticide, child abuse, prostitution, male rape, violence, mutilation and the apparent modern day incarnation of Jesus entertaining sexual thoughts. In one sequence, Desmond Tutu is assassinated. In another, John Lennon returns from the dead.

"IT WAS CLUNKY AND DERIVATIVE, BUT THERE'S THE SEED OF SOMETHING INTERESTING"

ABOVE: Issue five saw the beginning of a new direction for the story, but sadly the comic only lasted one more issue due to publisher bankruptcy.

Reflecting on the content, Kitching – who stresses Millar's scripts were some of the best he worked on – nonetheless feels "that Mark was always desperate to get noticed. Sorry, that sounds a bit demeaning. Let's say, 'determined'.

"To me, it never felt radical, just wilfully controversial. Impudent. It's not saying very much other than, 'Aren't I being naughty?'"

Wilfully controversial – would Millar accept that? "Oh, 100 per cent!" he says. "That was the tool-kit of the British writer. In the post *Warrior* [a ground-breaking, adult UK comic which ran from 1982-85] world, you'd have to think, 'Okay, how do I get this in? How do I get that in?' and you'd build your stories around those shocking moments. It's not a great way to write, but it is a way to write.

"I think a lot of us were copying the 1980s writers, guys who inspired us, like Alan Moore. And they did it so much better. If they were doing something shocking, it would be part of an incredibly grand scheme, whereas the younger generation of writers like myself would just be trying to think of the funniest or most visually interesting way to kill a beloved character. It was relatively unsophisticated."

In regard to a scene where it's communicated the antichrist has just had sex with a priest, Millar says: "For some reason, at the time, the signature of a British writer was to have buggery in a comic. I think it was after that *Miracleman* issue [published in 1988, depicting the sexual assault of Kid Miracleman's alter ego Johnny Bates] and everyone thought, 'We're very important writers, we have to tick every box in the controversial list.'"

Despite that, the storytelling in *The Saviour* generally reports, rather than depicts, these acts. "I think, even at 18, I was very careful about what people would see," reflects Millar. "To have something referred to is very different from actually seeing it illustrated."

Kitching concurs. "It was actually very kitchen-sink drama, lots of people on streets, and cars. I hate drawing cars! Visually, it was often quite mundane."

Issue five, dated October 1990, saw the series lurch into a new direction with the revelation that the supposed Jesus figure was actually an angel, Faeragel, who'd been cast out of Heaven having dismembered a woman in a confused rage. "A creature born into an asexual body, with all the drives of a sweaty human," says

ABOVE: Millar's ideas may have seemed blasphemous, but he's keen to point out he never actually mocked religion.

the Saviour, before crucifying his enemy… and urinating on him.

LEARNING THE CRAFT

"I had no idea what I was doing," admits Millar. "I was genuinely making it up as I was going along, thinking, 'I'm kind of bored with this – what can I do to make it interesting? I know, I'll reinvent it brilliantly!' Then; still no idea what I was doing.

"It's one of those things – I'm delighted by the idea I saw print when I was a teenager, but at the same time, it's like your sixth form poetry being published. You sort of think, 'It would have been nice a few years later, when I'd learned my craft'. More sophisticatedly handled, *The Saviour* could have been good. It's a fun concept, but don't let a schoolboy do it."

One more issue came out in January 1991, but shortly after, Trident went out of business. Its sister company, Apocalypse Ltd, had launched, and then lost a ton of money on, *Toxic!*, a would-be weekly rival to *2000 AD*. Although issue seven of *The Saviour* was completed (see overleaf), it was never published.

"I remember something about the printers not being paid, and so they held on to some of Trident's original artwork as a bargaining tool," says Kitching. "But, of course, the guys who owned the company couldn't care less about that. It was just the artists who lost out."

The day after *Comic Heroes* spoke to Mark Millar, he got back in touch. "I actually dug out *The Saviour* for the first time in 25 years," he reported. "It's not quite as bad as I remember. It's still nowhere near good, of course, but it's actually a lot more earnest than I'd recalled. Very 1980s, where every issue was about something, whether it was religion or homelessness or famine in Africa… Stephen King, Jamie Delano and, of course, Alan Moore all weighing heavily on every page, but translated by a sixth former. It's trying incredibly hard to keep up with the big boys, but ultimately it was probably no bad thing it stopped being published.

"It was clunky and derivative, but there's the seed of something interesting."

SEVENTH HEAVEN

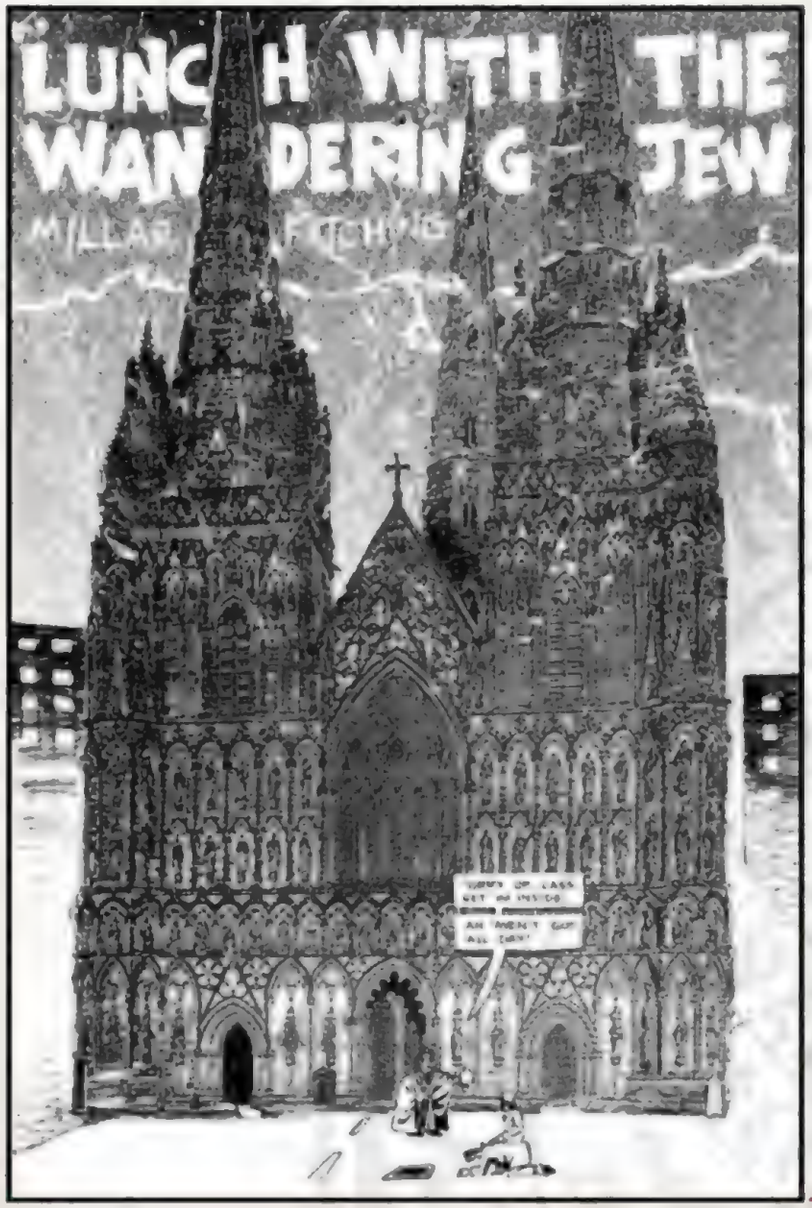
COMIC HEROES RESURRECTS THE NEVER-PUBLISHED ISSUE OF **THE SAVIOUR**

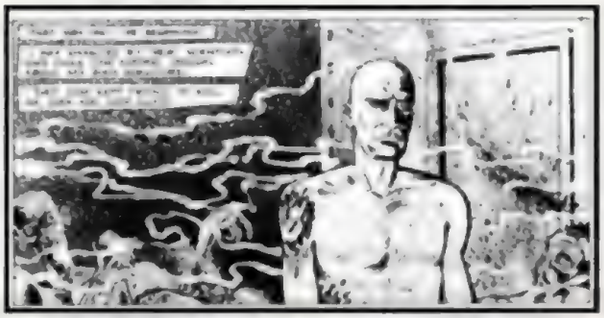
While in discussion with Nigel Kitching, he mentioned he had a copy of the completed cover and pages for *The Saviour* issue seven, the one that never saw print. "This bizarre *Doctor Who* reference comes in, with this priest and a time-travelling church [referred to as C.A.T.H.E.D.R.A.L.]," Kitching revealed.

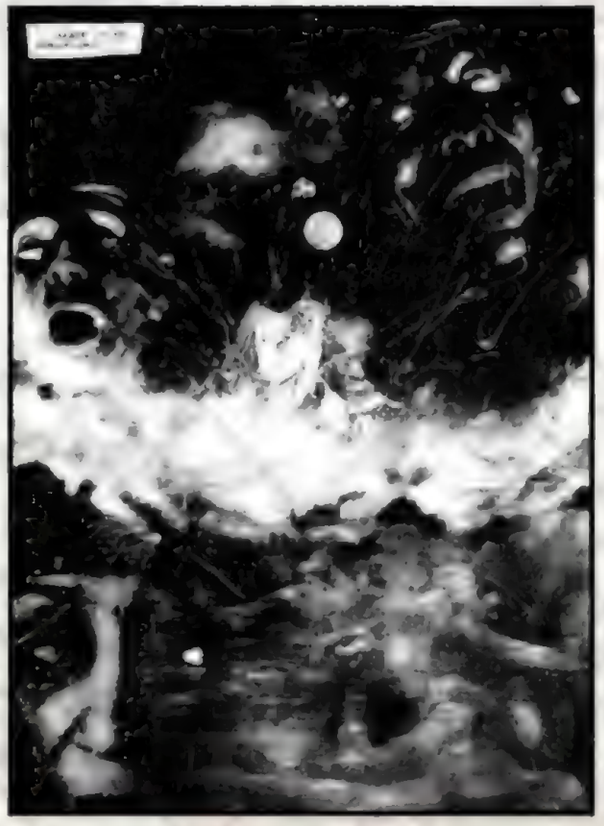
He kindly made them available to *Comic Heroes*, and we shared his find with Mark Millar.

"Oh man," he says, having leafed through 24 pages that encompass an immortal Judas relaying his experiences in a Nazi concentration camp ("They just kept trying to kill me, over and over again"), gasmask-wearing angels ripping the faces from children, the Baby Jesus having been sent to Hell… and a charity golf match. "I had genuinely forgotten every page of this. I'd forgotten it even existed. It's absolutely searching for influences and going off in a million directions. I really had no idea what I was doing, did I?"

THIS SPREAD: Where do you go next with a story like *The Saviour*? The unpublished issue seven sees Peter and Linda fleeing from wood elementals to be rescued by Archbishop Dominic Libido (patron saint of corrupted priests) in his travelling home C.A.T.H.E.D.R.A.L. ("What's that supposed to stand for?" "Time And Relative Dimensions In Space"). As angels punish sinning children and miracles start occurring around the world, the travellers make it into Purgatory…


LUNCH WITH THE WANDERING JEW





THE SEVENPENNY NIGHTMARE

IT WAS A GROUNDBREAKING '70s PUBLICATION INTENDED TO DRAG STAID BRITISH COMICS INTO THE MODERN AGE. THE KIDS LOVED IT, BUT THEIR PARENTS AND THE MEDIA CONDEMNED IT AND ULTIMATELY DESTROYED IT. SEAN EGAN TELLS THE TUMULTUOUS STORY OF ACTION

FACING PAGE: *Action* more than lived up to its name

ABOVE: It was mainly for budget reasons that Pat Mills commissioned Spanish and Argentinian artists for *Action* – Brit artist Mike White on "Kids Rule O.K." being a notable exception – but they had the effect of giving the comic a less polished, more edgy look than its rivals, and readers loved it

"Boys' comics were in massive decline. Sales were falling both for IPC titles and for DC Thomson, and both of them were struggling to find a new way to relate to boys."

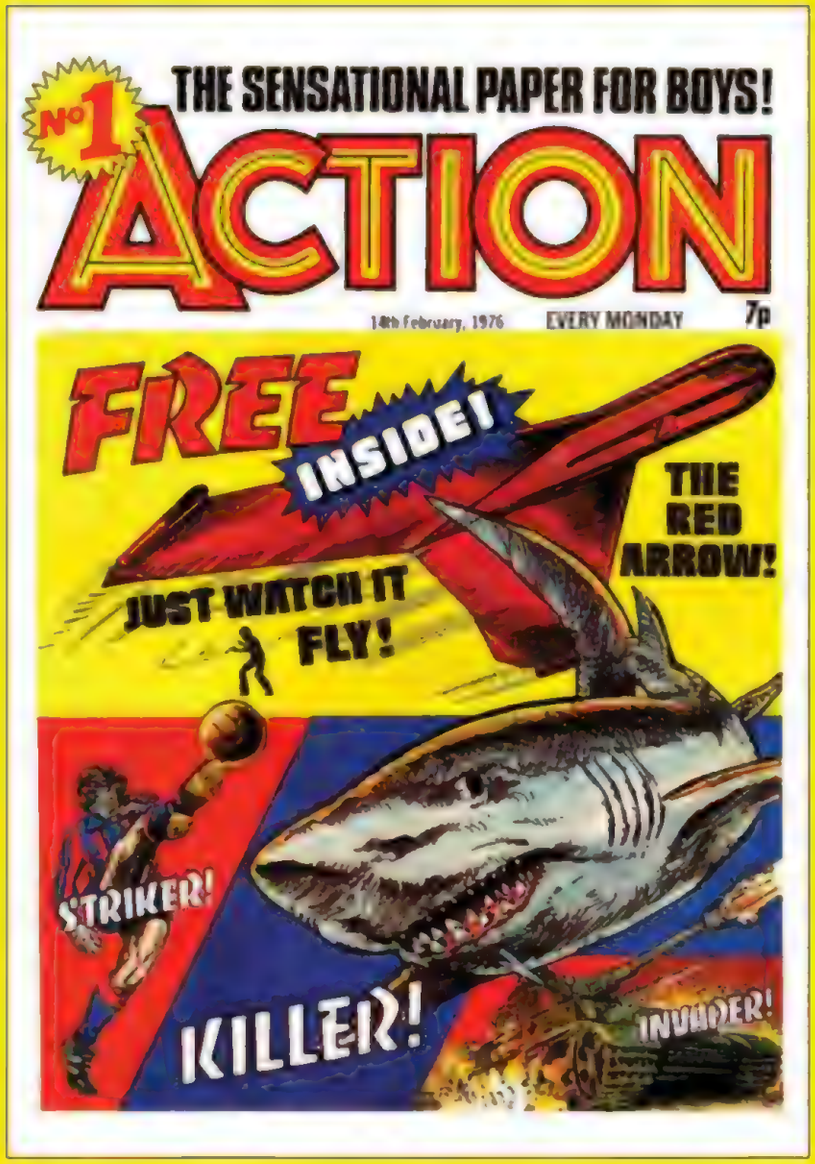
Martin Barker, author of *Action: The Story Of A Violent Comic*, is recalling the late 1970s, a time of uncertainty and furious competition in British comics. It culminated in the country's two main comic publishers issuing rival boys' adventure anthology weeklies on the same day. Both *Action* (IPC) and *Bullet* (DC Thomson) sought to create a new paradigm for British comics, which were clearly lagging behind the times and behind the more stylish fare of Marvel.

In the 1976 Valentine's Day face-off (both new titles had cover dates of February 14), *Action* was for most the clear winner, pulsating with qualities then rarely or never seen in UK comics: realism, relevance, moral ambiguity and graphic violence. The alleged modernism of *Bullet*, meanwhile, was embodied by "Fireball", a hero whose Jason King image was already laughably out of date. However, it was *Action*'s very radicalism that laid the foundations for it being engulfed by scandal and consigned to an early grave.

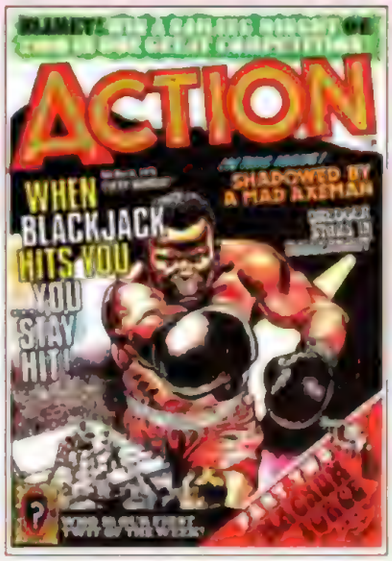
"*ACTION* WAS FOR MOST THE CLEAR WINNER, PULSATING WITH QUALITIES THEN RARELY OR NEVER SEEN IN UK COMICS: REALISM, RELEVANCE, MORAL AMBIGUITY AND GRAPHIC VIOLENCE"

Action was the brainchild of Pat Mills, who although only in his mid-20s already had a significant reputation as both a comic writer and comic creator. In 1975, Mills and John Wagner had devised *Battle Picture Weekly* for IPC, a title that rejected bland, square-jawed war heroics for the sort of nuance and cynicism seen in movies like *The Dirty Dozen* and *Kelly's Heroes*. Now John Sanders – head of IPC's comics department – wanted Mills to bring the same qualities to a general title.

"In total it was probably three months," Mills says he was given to take *Action* from the drawing board to the newsagents' shelves.



ABOVE: Not much about the cover of *Action*'s first issue even hinted that it was any different from the usual. The short-lived "Coffin Sub" was the most conventional of its contents, too

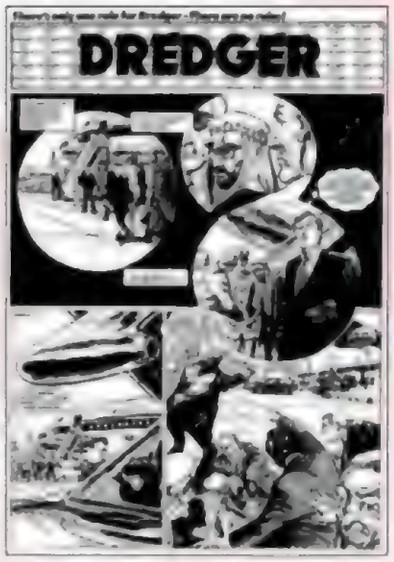


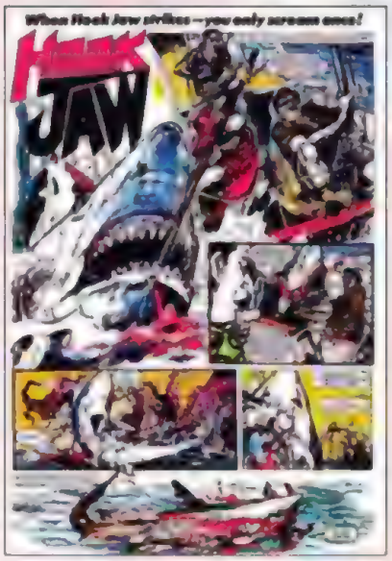
"It certainly was frenetic. It looks crazy looking back on it, but it was actually the norm at that time."

Action was to be even more radical than *Battle*. "What I was aiming for was a tough, working-class tone to the thing," says Mills, who was offended by the British-comics Dan Dare-Digby syndrome – forceful middle-class heroes with subservient proletarian sidekicks. For *Action*, accordingly, he created "DI6" operative Dredger, whom he describes as "a grungy secret agent rather than the usual Eton-educated James Bond." The fact that Dredger's upper-class colleague Breed was second banana, he adds, gave him "enormous pleasure."

Further, *Action* had a post-Watergate tone, with people in power being shown as eminently questionable. "And of course that would reflect the readers' own lives, because they're dealing with any number of authority figures, and a lot of authority figures were very scarred and negative and unpleasant individuals."

Although emphasising that he did not approve of all of it, Mills reveals that he took his cue from nihilist literature like Sven Hassel's blood-strewn novels about German soldiers, John Norman's kinky sword-and-sorcery Gor cycle, Herbert Van Thal's Pan books of





horror stories, and Richard Allen's skinhead novels.

Action also gave kids access to sensational movies by proxy. "This was slightly before videos, so an 11-year-old kid can't get to see *Dirty Harry* but he can get to see Dredger."

IF IT WORKED IN THE MOVIES...

Films in general were a big and blatant influence on the new publication, but Mills insists that *Action* equivalents did not just rip off their big-screen inspirations. "*Rollerball* is good, but 'Death Game 1999' is better because the whole thing is based on a pinball," he declares. In "Hook Jaw", the expected morality was turned on its head via the fact that – unlike in *Jaws* – rapacious man was the villain: "It was an ecological story. These guys are trying to get the oil and they don't care who gets in the way, and Hook Jaw is this force of nature challenging them."

Mills spurned the "god-like powers" of superheroes, striving instead for physical "realism" and "authenticity." Few of *Action*'s protagonists were without psychological flaw, either. Mills explains: "We'd realised from *Battle* that boys in that age group, they actually like anti-heroes. It makes for a compelling drama."

Another ingredient on which Mills insisted was paciness. "You've only got three pages, and what the readers objected to often was too much exposition, too much standing around talking. They wanted to get on with the action."

That action would be unlike any seen in the likes of *Eagle*, *Lion* or *Valiant*. "Hook Jaw", for instance, was usually given the coveted centrespread – traditionally in UK weeklies the only interior pages of full colour – and this would not seem unrelated to the opportunity it provided to show blood in vivid red as the vengeful ocean giant tore bodies apart. This was disturbing for many, but other examples of *Action* violence had an additionally disquieting layer: in a society worried about increasing delinquency, grimy depictions of urban conflict in "Sport's Not for Losers!" and "The Running Man" were both too close to home and too easily imitable.

"I don't think any of the stories particularly glorified violence," insists Mills. "You can feature characters in a tough world but you can still keep your moral compass... It never occurred to me that it might harm readers."

Mills was able to bring about unusually dynamic artwork by both trawling Argentinian shores for the

ABOVE: Pat Mills drew on the most popular concepts in movies of the time, then added a twist – and violence!

ABOVE Mills was very much in tune with the trends of the times and drew inspiration from a wide variety of popular culture, particularly books that would have been just slightly out of reach for teenage buyers of the comics of the day.

likes of Alcatuna and Lalia and utilising the cutting-edge design skills of art-editor-in-chief Doug Church. In other areas, however, he encountered hindrances to his new-wave methods. "Some of the writers were rather staid in their approach. Often it would need substantial re-writing to give it an *Action*-hard tone." Then there were obstacles on the management side. "Hellman of Hammer Force" depicted World War II through Axis eyes. Mills: "John Sanders was concerned that the British Legion would object." "Blackjack" sought to capitalise on the phenomenal popularity of Muhammad Ali, but with a twist: in order to provide inspiration for his fans in deprived areas, this black Briton was determined to keep competing in the ring despite slowly going blind. "To have a black hero was very, very unusual in the 1970s," says Mills. "The managing editor said to me, 'Why don't you have a white boxer with a black sidekick?' I just looked at him, stunned."

The subversive tone was carried over to text pages, which dispensed with light-hearted editorial templates in favour of barbed irreverence. The facts and trivia purveyed by resident expert "Know-All" were – rather than being celebrated – ridiculed as

8th May, 1976
ACTION
EVERY MONDAY 7p
PRESENTS
DEATH GAME 1999
They call it a sport... it's more like plain murder

useless, while irritating celebrities were denounced in the "Twit of the Week" column. Mills' inspiration was the short, punchy and slogan-festooned style of *The Sun*, albeit in an inverted way – his objective was "to play the right-wing publications at their own game."

Just about the only jarring note amongst this overarching sense of modernity was the fact that *Action* featured rather soulless typed speech balloons, which Mills now concedes was probably a mistake.

Although Geoff Kemp was the publication's editor, Mills was "running" the first 12 issues of *Action*: "I'm looking and changing artwork and at the same time I'm planning the replacement stories that would come in..." he says. "Because we were working on very short lead times, any story that wasn't right we could get rid of pretty quickly and come in with a cooler replacement."

> "YOU CAN FEATURE CHARACTERS IN A TOUGH WORLD BUT YOU CAN STILL KEEP YOUR MORAL COMPASS"

NOT SUITABLE FOR ADULTS!

It was the departure of both himself and Kemp that, for Mills, sowed the seeds of *Action*'s destruction. "The subsequent era was sadly an era of absolute chaos because Geoff Kemp only remained as editor for a couple of months after that and then he was replaced by John Smith, who had no background of adventure comics and therefore didn't always know where to draw the line."

IPC courted publicity for its great new hope. In *Action*'s first few weeks, John Sanders granted interviews to radio shows *Today* and *Newsbeat*. The London *Evening Standard* carried a large print feature the same month. All noted the comic's unusual violence and edgy tone. *The Sun* ran a centrespread on the comic in April and, although it was not overtly hostile, its headline gave *Action* a ready-made pejorative nickname: "The Sevenpenny Nightmare".

Action responded to the equivocal publicity with defiant cover straplines like "WARNING! This comic is not suitable for adults!" Nonetheless, Sanders instructed the *Action* staff to try to address some of the criticism. Mills recalls this edict as being "fairly lukewarm," explaining: "The gist of it would have been, 'Look, tone it down while we're getting all this press attention'." This lukewarm recantation was no doubt due to the fact that the part of the public which mattered was voting with its pocket money: *Action* was IPC's best-selling boys' weekly.

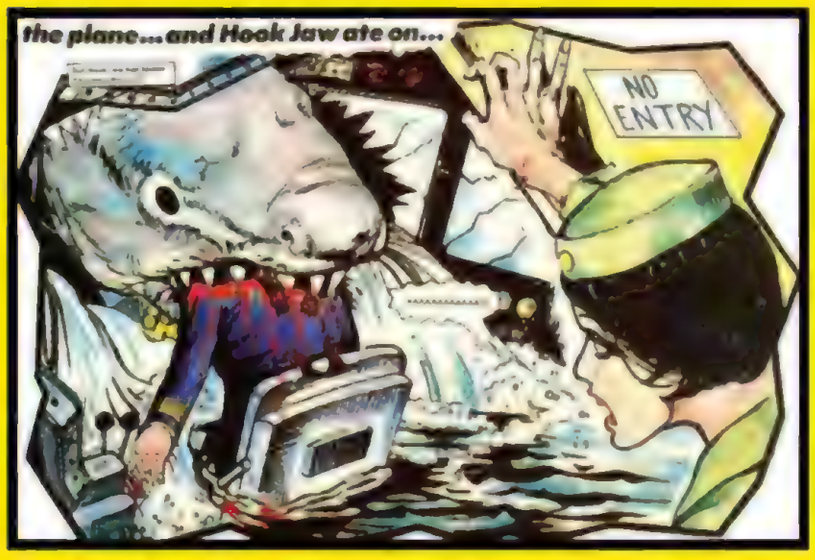
Certainly, the new stories that began to replace strips that had run their course or polled low in readers' responses continued to cleave to *Action*'s unflinching remit. "Kids Rule O.K." pictured a dystopian future where the adults were prematurely dying and the yobs were taking control. "Probationer" concerned a teenager forced to endure the company of low-lifes. "Look Out For Lefty" – like "Play Till You Drop" before it – was a repudiation of the clean-cut Roy-Of-The-Rovers football archetype and even boasted inflections of sex and feminism: not only was it then unusual for a UK comic character to have a girlfriend, but short-haired tomboy Angie was the boss in the relationship with soccer prodigy Lefty Lampton.

By September '76, Mills – his instigator work done – had given up his role on the publication but was still coming in to IPC's base in King's Reach Tower, where he was devising a new science-fiction publication, eventually titled *2000 AD*. When one day he was pulled aside by an art assistant and gleefully shown the next *Action*, Mills was horrified by what he saw. The September 18 issue featured a "Kids Rule O.K." cover depicting a bicycle-chain wielding teenager standing over a prostrate adult. Worse, because a policeman's helmet was lying nearby, the colourist had mistakenly assumed the grounded adult to be an officer of the law and had rendered his clothing accordingly. Says Mills, "It looks like the comic is condoning a thug beating up a policeman, and that makes for such a strong image that can be taken out of context. I would never have okayed that cover."

FACING PAGE: Another successful reworking of a popular film of the day.

TOP: The ill-conceived cover that marked the beginning of the end.

ABOVE: More of the popular culture cited by Mills as his sources.



ABOVE: "Hook Jaw" was the runaway star of *Action*. To this day Mills insists it was at heart an eco-warrior story, and the shark's victims were frequently lowlifes. But boys loved the blood.

By an unfortunate coincidence, the same issue carried a panel that was highly inflammatory in the context of an era when football hooliganism was causing severe public concern: Angie was shown throwing a bottle at a player who was harassing Lefty on the pitch. The Football League denounced the strip, the *Daily Mail* ran a story headlined "Comic Strip Hooligans", and questions were asked in Parliament.

THE BACKLASH

The scattered disquiet previously expressed by various pockets of the media, individual parents and the Newsagents Federation now crystallised into something more serious. Says Martin Barker, "A rumour went round that [leading retailer] WH Smith issued a threat to IPC: 'If you don't withdraw this comic, we will not only pull that from our shelves, we will pull every single IPC publication.' There were a couple of people on the board of IPC who were evangelical Christians. It is possible that the rumour was spread in order to cause panic inside IPC."

The issue of *Action* cover-dated 23 October 1976 had been prepared, but it never appeared. That IPC waited for John Sanders to be on holiday before taking the decision

to suspend publication of *Action* reveals, for Barker, "an internal battle inside IPC of quite a considerable scale."

Mills is not surprised that IPC would jeopardise reader loyalty by making their product temporarily unavailable: "There was a lot of tacit resistance to what a new generation and a new wave were doing to comics, and so they were delighted to get their hands on *Action* and to castrate it, and they did a very good job of castrating it."

Ex-*Valiant* editor Sid Bicknell (Mills: "very old-school") began a process that, when the comic reappeared on the newsstands on December 4, made *Action* a very different beast. "Kids Rule O.K." and "Probationer" had disappeared, never to return. "Hook Jaw" was still resident, but the explicit slaughter that had been the strip's *raison d'être* had become thin on the ground. The toning-down of "Death Game 1999" was symbolised by its change of title to "Spinball". Meanwhile "Hell's Highway" – a strip about a pair of truck drivers blackmailed into working for a US security agency – had been denuded of its sceptical attitude toward governmental organisations such as the CIA.

Lovers of the original *Action* insist that this new-look version repulsed its readership and failed ignominiously. In IPC's defence, this narrative is at least called into question by the fact that the publication lasted a further year before being merged with *Battle*, a lifespan that was not bad going for the times. (When *2000 AD* was named in 1977, it was all but inconceivable that the comic would actually last until the year 2000.) This relative longevity, Mills offers, "indicates the readers' affection for what *Action* stood for, even in a [tamed] version."

While the revolution might seem to have been brought to a forcible close, Mills feels *Action* created ripples in the long term: "It led to *2000 AD*," he says of his new baby, birthed in February 1977. "Then *2000 AD* in turn begat all sorts of other possibilities."

> "THEY TOLD US TO TAKE OUT ALL THE ADULT POLITICAL STUFF AND TURN IT BACK INTO AN ADVENTURE COMIC"

2000 AD's subversive sci-fi, surreal humour and apotheosis of anti-heroism, Judge Dredd, ultimately enraptured DC and Marvel so much that they began raiding the UK for talent, thus altering the tone and possibilities of American comics forever. Mills: "*Action* really was the forerunner and the tester of everything."

REALITY CHECK

Of all the groundbreaking comics he created – which also include IPC's supernatural girls' title *Misty* – Mills says, "My heart is probably closer to *Action*, because it's about real people and real situations."

Apart from a "Hook Jaw" collection and Barker's book – itself as much analysis as reproduction – *Action* strips have not been granted the immortality conferred on much of *2000 AD* by the reprint-anthology industry. "Comics today are largely run by fans and they're fans of fantasy and science fiction," conjectures Mills. "Publishers aren't that interested because it's not their thing."

FACING PAGE, TOP: The twist in *Hellman* was that the title character, although an exemplary soldier and anti-Nazi, was German.

ABOVE: *Bullet* arrived at the same time as Action but proved to be an underwhelming rival, nowhere near as "rough tough" as it made out.

It's noteworthy that, for both Barker and Mills, *Action* was killed off not for its violence but for its impertinence. Although acknowledging the notorious September 18 issue as a turning point, Mills suggests that it was "the end of a journey, the end of a series of attacks on *Action*." He avers, "People in authority really took exception to what *Action* was about. It wasn't just because it was a violent comic [or] because it was proclaiming working class heroes. It was also because it was sticking two fingers up to the establishment."

Mills' view gets some backing from Barker, who reveals: "Colin Wyatt, who was the art editor, said to me, 'They told us to take out all the adult political stuff and turn it back into an adventure comic'."

Barker's tone is almost wistful as he sums up *Action*: "Something special for a brief time is made possible, but in that very specialness captures the eye of the censors, who go for it." The original, unfettered *Action* lasted just 36 issues. Its safer rival *Bullet* ran for 147.

And suddenly, that brief cameo in Guy Pellaert's Rock Dreams.

How to convey, here, that astonished stare the enthralled Tony Curtis gave him at the end of TRAPEZE?

Or the words of Romain Gary before that beautiful landscape in THE MIDNIGHT MAN (Le Flic se rebiffe, 1974):

"He was this unbelievable tomcat - scabby, mangy, marmelade-orange, with tattered ears and one of those sinister, mustachioed, knowing faces that old tomcats end up with by dint of rich and varied experiences."

Oh, Burt! Burt, you were my favorite actress!

"Poor little Jacko missed his hold at last: fell plump on the deck and broke his neck. That was the end of him."

Blutch

WORLD OF Comics

BLUTCH

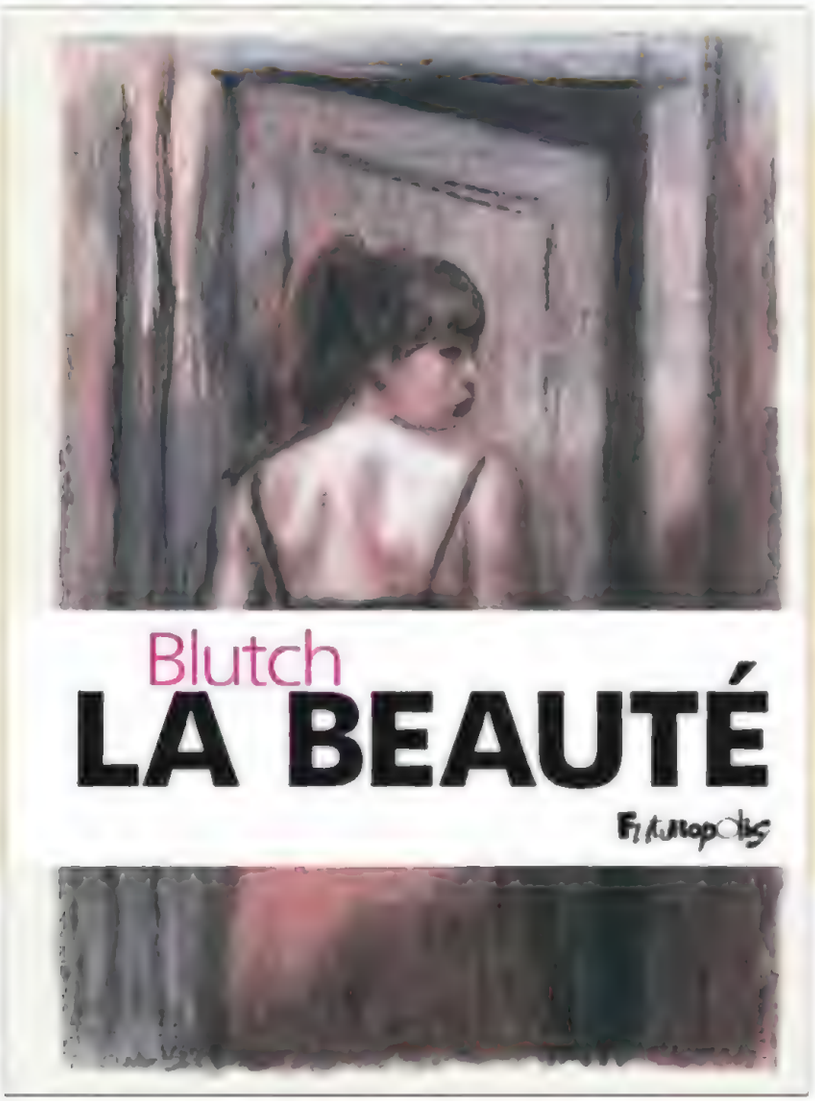
American dreaming

Although he's fixated on American culture, ***Blutch*** is not widely known in English-speaking countries. With one of Blutch's masterworks newly translated, ***Paul Gravett*** interviews the acclaimed, ever-challenging creator

Blutch is an artists' artist, admired and influential for the daring draftsmanship and ceaseless innovation of his bandes dessinées. He was born Christian Hincker in 1967 in Strasbourg, France; "Blutch" was his childhood nickname, because his friends thought he looked and behaved exactly like the reluctant hero Corporal Blutch in the popular American Civil war series *The Blue Tunics*, by Belgians Lambil and Cauvin. The nickname and link with comics both stuck, and he won the Grand Prix in Angoulême in 2009. With the translation of his feverish Roman epic *Peplum* out in April from New York Review Comics, what better time to talk to this modern master of the Ninth Art?

COMIC HEROES: What is the act of drawing for you now? Is it a delight, an obsession, a distraction, a disorder? Or a way to keep a distance from the world, while examining and interpreting it?
BLUTCH: It's all of these things at the same time, with variable intensities depending on periods of my life or emotional upsets. Drawing is a paradoxical act, it's a way to cut yourself off from the world and people, and at the same time to question that world and those people. As a child, plunging myself into drawing was clearly a retreat, a withdrawal. I'd prefer to stay at home rather than go out.

CH: What was it like growing up in Strasbourg in Alsace-Lorraine, on the border of France and Germany?
B: Growing up on a border, straddling two countries, two languages, I had to develop a double understanding of the world and its issues. The Alsatian dialect was my first language. When I started school I didn't speak a word of French. German television and music stars were familiar to us at home, and German pop culture had a profound effect on me, like Pippi Langschtrumpf [the German name for spirited girl Pippi Longstocking by Swedish author Astrid Lindgren] or the Apache Winnetou [based on German writer Karl May's Native American tales]. After



"I'm a product of somewhere dazzled by American culture"

the Second World War, West Germany was covered with American military bases. The Americanisation of this region was more rapid than in France, so via German television we got the big US series like *Starsky and Hutch* and *Dallas* long before the French. And we shouldn't forget Hollywood movies and their irresistible sex appeal. So I'm a product of somewhere dominated and dazzled by American culture. Nothing wrong with that, that's how it was. I was born French-American.

CH: You have said "Carl Barks and I come from the same place". How have the great Disney comic books by "The Duck Man" affected you?

B: Barks is definitely the artist who most deeply touched me as a little boy. His poetic inspiration, his cheerful melancholy, his sense of space remain in my eyes unique and always inspiring.

CH: You describe making comics as "trying to express life within the restraining and narrow frame of small drawings trapped into sequential panels." Is the medium confining to you?

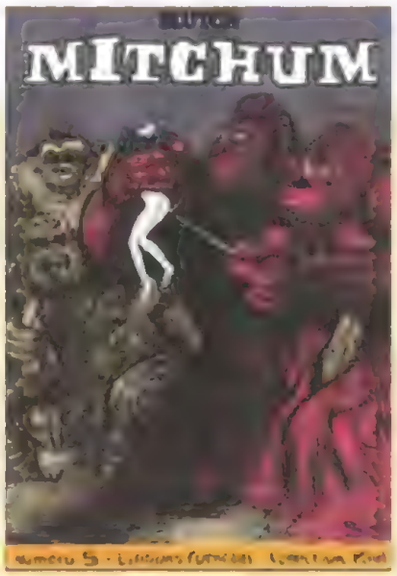
B: For me, no artistic practice offers as many plastic and literary possibilities as comics. It's comics where I can make full use of my capacities. I have everything I need: the image and the word. A strange and mysterious marriage, the perfect poetic language.

CH: How did you find your first home in comics at adult humour magazine *Fluide Glacial*?

B: In 1987 I was an art student in Strasbourg. We were readers of *Fluide Glacial*. I was a loyal but not intense reader, and we learned one day in its pages that the magazine was organising a comics contest, with the first prize of having your comics published, plus the stratospheric sum of 5,000 francs. Over the summer I made a four-page story entitled "Les Aventures de Tintin". I won the contest and my comic was published in early 1988. I was 20 and had broken in.

Above left: *La Beauté* (*Beauty*) is a teasing, controversial, freeform meditation on beauty.

Above right: *So Long, Silver Screen*, released in English in 2013 by Picturebox, was Blutch's first full-length work available in English



CH: For *Fluide Glacial* you devised a satirical alter-ego from the past, Blotch.
B: The stories about Blotch take place around 1935-1938. He's a cartoonist aged around 50 who has put his artistic life as a painter to one side. He publishes pathetic cartoons in a paper called *Fluide Glacial*. He is bitter, fat, full of pretensions and prejudices. His world is a version of my own, in any case [at the time] when I was drawing his adventures; all the protagonists were modelled on real life. You might say Blotch is a sort of self-portrait.

CH: Outside France, your five-issue series *Mitchum* (1997-2002) from Cornélius was many English-speakers' first exposure to your work. How did these mostly wordless short stories affect your approach to comics?
B: *Mitchum* was my laboratory at a certain point. Every kind of experiment was permitted. Their success or failure were secondary. The only rule to respect was the excitement of making them. David Mazzucchelli at the time defined this project as "an emotional diary". This work was very influenced by my frequent visits to New York at that time (1994-97) and by the artists, living and dead, I got to know there.

CH: *So Long, Silver Screen*, your first book translated into English in 2013, is part essay, part reverie, on the history, meaning and allure of film. What have the movies meant to you?
B: Films are a thousand faces, a thousand voices. I could never give a complete answer to this here. The cinema has accompanied me and nourished me since I can see and hear. It's a fascinating, disturbing jungle. I made that whole book on the subject and yet I feel I've said nothing.

Above: Much of Blutch's work is largely wordless, like the surreal *Mitchum* - it's more a dreamlike reverie than a narrative, weaving around themes of sex, art, dance, and inevitably Americana. *Total Jazz*, also wordless, aspires to reflect some of Blutch's experience of his favourite musicians.

CH: You've also been involved in movies. Can you tell us about your experiences contributing to the animated *Peur(s) du Noir* [Fear(s) of the Night, 2007] or collaborating with Alain Resnais and as an actor on screen?
B: The different types of work don't require the same engagement. Each requires a different involvement. *Peur(s) du Noir* was like crossing the Valley of Death with a leaky

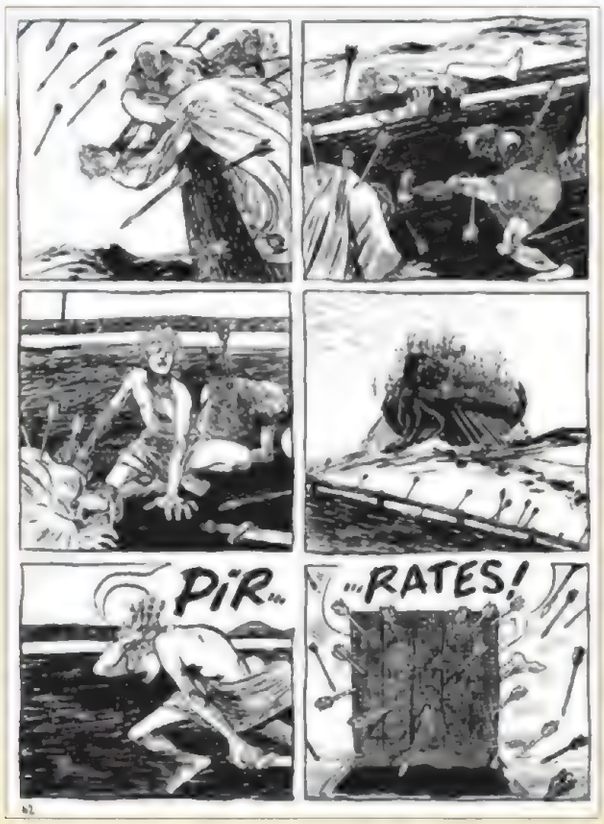
bottle of water. I had a remarkable team working with me, but I came to understand that animation was not for me. It is such a slow, meticulous process which needs great endurance. The little patience I have, I apply to comics. My work with Resnais was totally different. I put myself in the artist's service. It was like working in an old master painter's studio. And appearing in films is fun, a childish pleasure. I can play and I'm not responsible for what I say. It's liberating and, despite the jitters, paradoxically relaxing.

CH: What were the challenges and rewards of working on *Peplum*, your first extended graphic novel?

B: Adapting *The Satyricon*, the "Roman novel" by Petronius, requires you to take time, simply to try to recreate the scope of his fresco and evoke in the pages some faint breath of this epic. Having broken in at *Fluide Glacial*, a short-story magazine, I dreamt of working for *(A Suivre)*, a magazine serialising graphic novels. *Peplum* is a reaction to my initial career as an author. I've always wanted to escape myself, break habits, routines. To never know yourself, to always start over.

CH: What drew you to this Roman theme and setting?

B: I wanted to imagine and describe a pre-Christian world. We are at the end of the Roman Republic. It's a harsh world, not that far from pre-history, where humans have not yet mastered other animals; they are their equals, living on the same land. A confusing, almost abstract world, cut off completely from our conceptions, a bit like an alien planet and its disturbing inhabitants. I wanted to avoid any grandiose historical reconstruction. *Peplum* is the opposite of *Alix* [Jacques Martin's Roman boy hero], far from *Ben Hur*. I really like Joseph L. Mankiewicz and I was much more inspired by his Julius Caesar than his Cleopatra. As sources I drew especially on Fellini (*Satyricon*), Pasolini (*Medea*) and Welles (*Othello*, Falstaff). Of course I read the Latin writers Suetonius and Tacitus, but also George Bernard Shaw, Roger Caillois and Jacques Tardi. The demented human society in Tardi's *Polonius* can be found in my own approach.



Above: The Hollywood adventure element is there in *Peplum*, Blutch's hallucinatory version of *The Satyricon*, but the focus is more often the sheer strangeness of ancient Rome. Blutch has said he wanted it to feel not like a lavish epic but one of Orson Welles's low-budget, character-led Shakespeare films.

CH: What were the problems you met serialising *Peplum* in *(A Suivre)* magazine in 1996?

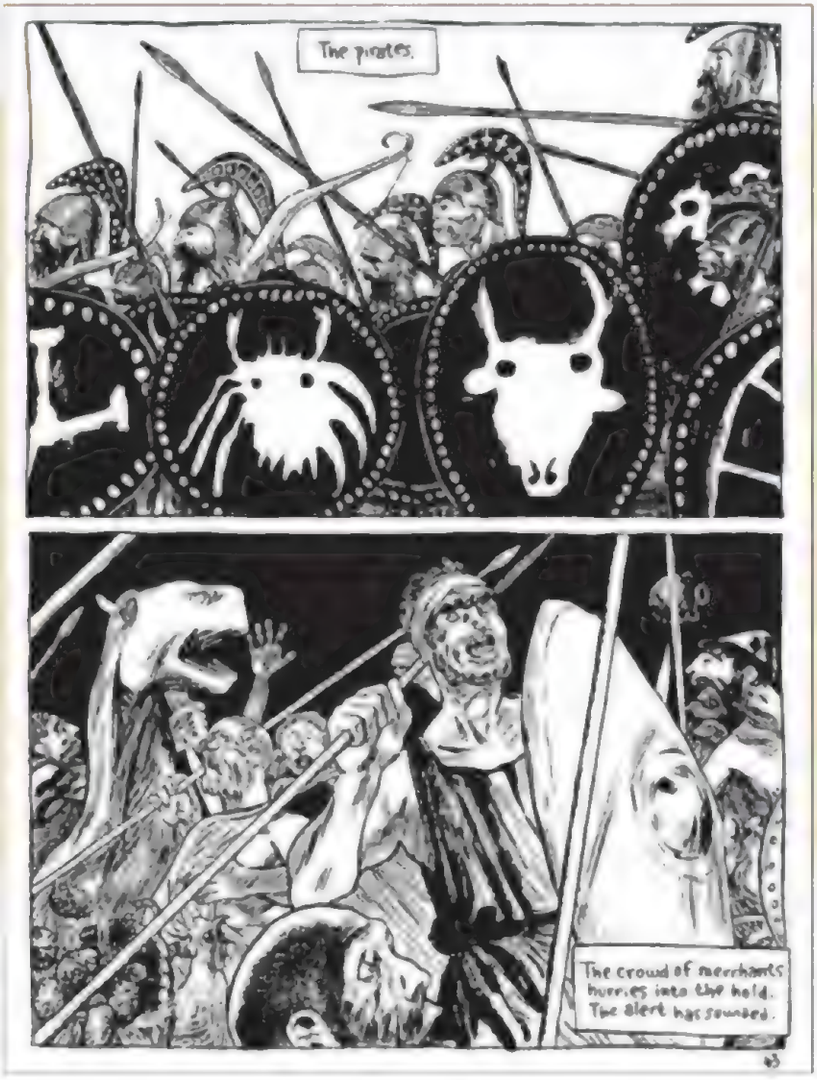
B: For some reason, *(A Suivre)* considered my work unsuitable as it was for the pages of the magazine, which is why they published a truncated version of my story. Luckily, Cornélius saved my work and enabled *Peplum* to take its true form as I wanted in 1998.

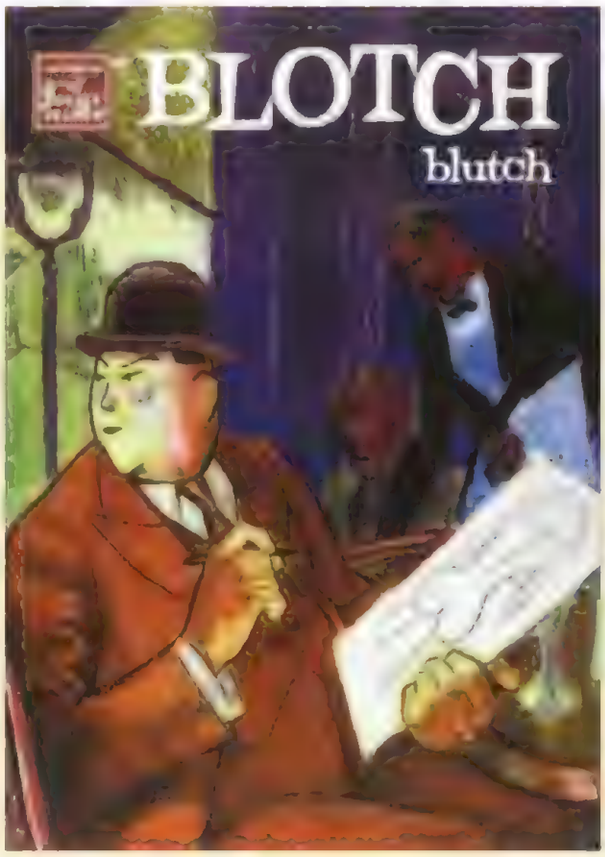
CH: You changed style and genre again in *Le Petit Christian*, part serialised in *Charlie Hebdo*. What made you want to examine the world of children?

B: This involved extending a work I had made as a student. I started *Le Petit Christian* in 1988 as single-page gags, as an exercise. These became part of my Diploma show the following year at the Strasbourg School of Decorative Arts. So we're going back nearly 30 years, but I think I was looking for something light and funny to tell. And childhood is something we all know and I wanted to address everyone, so readers recognise themselves in my little hero's adventures. My childhood was still quite close then, the memories were vivid, the witnesses were there, the locations intact. I tried to get back to it all. Today *Le Petit Christian*'s world is fading into the fog.

CH: Would you consider doing another autobiographical comic, even if it's disguised?

B: For me it's not a question of putting myself literally centre stage. That would be of limited interest. Better to proceed behind a mask. Besides, *Le Petit Christian* is a false autobiography. Let's say that nothing is true but everything is accurate.





CH: Futuropolis offered you the precious freedom to expand your range through *C'était le bonheur, La Volupté* and *La Beauté* (2005-8). What were your ambitions with this trilogy?
B: This was a bit like the same principle as in the *Mitchum* series: with paper and pencil, anything is possible. The taste for experimentation, transgression. At that time I wanted to break free from the panel, to let my images breath. I felt confined on the comics page. I wanted to liberate my drawing, while holding on to the contents of a book.

CH: Why did you decide not to show any of your comics artwork in your Angoulême Grand Prix one-man exhibition?
B: I have always thought that a page of comics is not destined to be hung on a wall. It's not spectacular enough for that. A page is just a stage in the process, whose true end is the book. Basically, it's a form of industrial art.

CH: Among your other passions – for music, jazz in particular, and dance – what do they bring to your comics-making?
B: I appreciate music for its abstract qualities, whereas drawing is terribly concrete. Music rests my eyes and of course stimulates me. There's always something to learn and take from it, in the various forms which human genius takes. Life in general, and so art in particular, constantly influence my work. I am curious by nature.

CH: What other genre or project in comics would you like to try?
B: Perhaps a really erotic or completely pornographic comic. To finish with it, once and for all. On the other hand, in my current reworking of *Tif & Tondu* [the Belgian amateur detectives], I want to address ideas of youth. First of all my own, because we really loved those albums drawn by Will in our house. That's why I asked my brother Patrick to write a new story about the duo. We were seduced by the series' poetic fantasy mixed with the noir novel by writers Maurice Rosy and then Marcel Tillieux. Ever since I have been drawing, I've always copied images that move me. So this is as exciting as being a jazz musician, having to interpret a standard, reinterpet it and make it my own. I am playing again the pieces I love.

Above: Blutch's range is breathtaking, from the sweep of ancient Rome in *Peplum* to the self-mocking satire of *Blotch*, which features a grumpy middle-aged version of himself in late 1930s Paris. Blutch's work frequently veers off into the freewheeling, surreal and very personal

THE OFFICIAL MAGAZINE OF

MCM COMIC CON

MYM

NEW ISSUE OUT NOW!

Recent highlights include:

An exclusive preview of the video game guaranteed to make even veteran players cry, as *Dark Souls* returns

Cake! Candles! Cars! Critters! We celebrate the 30th birthday of *Transformers: The Movie* and the 20th anniversary of *Transformers: Beast Wars*

All the best cosplay and celebrity chat from MCM Comic Con's UK and international events!

Zombie apocalypse! MyM trains at a Zombie Boot Camp and battles virtual reality monsters in Virtually Dead

Top talent! Hear about the hottest movies and TV shows from the stars and creators themselves, including on-set exclusives and in-depth reports!

SAVE UP TO A 1/3 WITH A SUBSCRIPTION TO MYM!

UK Subscription	EU Subscription	World Wide Subscription
From £17	From £42	From £50

Don't miss a thing!

Back issues are available at
MCMExpoStore.com/collections/mym

VISIT MCMEXPOSTORE.COM/COLLECTIONS/MYM TO SUBSCRIBE NOW

COMICS WE RATE

The next dozen pages are crammed with reviews of the latest comics and graphic novels...

122 Paper Girls
123 Superman: American Alien
123 Silver Surfer
124 Spider-Man/ Deadpool
124 Cry Havoc
125 The Tipping Point
126 Irmina
126 Shaft: Imitation Of Life
127 The Walking Dead
128 Goldtiger
128 The Shield
129 The Steam Man
129 Grayson
130 Agatha
130 Deus Ex
130 An Android Awakes
131 Assassination Classroom
131 Surviving Megalopolis
132 Empress
132 Porcelain: Bone China
132 The Violent
133 Sex Criminals

RATINGS EXPLAINED

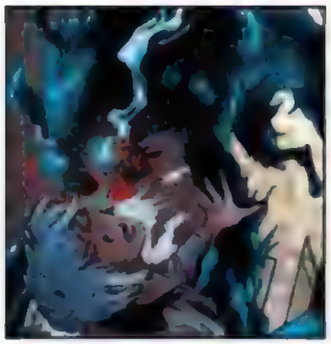
★★★★★ THE INCREDIBLES

★★★★½ GUARDIANS OF THE GALAXY

★★★½☆ MAN OF STEEL

★★☆☆☆ BATMAN AND ROBIN

★☆☆☆☆ GREEN HORNET



Freddy Kreuger's awfully polite nowadays.

"IF YOU THINK YOU KNOW WHERE THE STORY IS HEADED, YOU'RE WRONG"

Paper Girls

Reviewed: Issues 1-5
Writer: Brian K Vaughan
Artist: Cliff Chiang
Publisher: Image
Format: Ongoing

★★★★★

***Paper Girls* takes the kids-meet-aliens aesthetic of '80s movies like *ET* and *Flight Of The Navigator* (and recent homages like *Super 8* and *Earth To Echo*) and turns it inside out and upside down.**

Our protagonist, Erin Tieng, is twelve years old and starting her first day bike-delivering the *Cleveland Preserver* in her Ohio hometown. She soon falls in with fellow paper girls KJ, Tiffany and rough, tough local legend Mac. But it isn't just neighbourhood bullies or intolerant cops the four have to worry about. After discovering a weird, organic spaceship-like machine in a basement, they become embroiled in a conflict between opposing otherworldly factions, one deformed-looking and clad in rags, the other tech-armed and angelic. But which side should they trust?

If, from that synopsis, you think you know where the story is headed, you're wrong. As ever with a Brian K Vaughan script, expectations are overturned with each new plot revelation. The guy delights in wrong-footing readers, and readers should be glad to be wrong-footed so delightfully. In this initial five-issue arc you'll find time travellers, giant pterodactyl-like monster steeds, and a mysterious recurring "apple" motif that embraces the Garden of Eden, The Beatles and Steve Jobs and a whole lot more besides.

You'll also find career-best artwork from Cliff Chiang, mixing elements of Art Adams and Michael Allred and making visual storytelling look effortlessly easy. The colouring by Matt Wilson takes a little adjusting to, using as it does a palette reminiscent of an aerobics instructor's leotard collection, but it's era-appropriate and candy-beautiful.

Paper Girls is about the coolness of being in a gang and the confusion of being on the cusp of teenhood. Vaughan doesn't push the period detail too hard, confining himself to feathered-in references to videogames like *Asteroids* and *Arkanoid* and politicians such as Reagan and Michael Dukakis. It's '80s but not kitschily '80s.

The SF touches, as in *Saga*, are well thought through and sometimes sublime; for instance the English-variant language one of the alien factions speaks, a fusion of Shakespeare and Nadsat. Issue 5's ending is as time-twisty as anything in the *Back To The Future* trilogy and will leave you impatient to learn what comes next.

James Lovegrove

Superman
American Alien

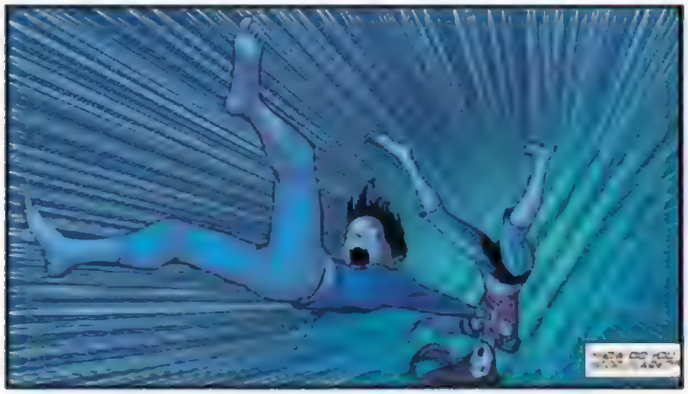
Reviewed: Issues 1–3
Writer: Max Landis
Artists: Nick Dragotta, Tommy Lee Edwards, Joelle Jones
Publisher: DC
Format: Limited series

★★★

To say screenwriter Max Landis is forthcoming is a bit like saying Batman doesn't particularly like criminals. He's ranted – at great length – about his problems with *Man Of Steel*, recently tweeting claims that *Batman V Superman*'s Lex Luthor is based on him. Now, DC has (possibly bravely) let him put his money where his mouth is, handing him the Fortress of Solitude keys and allowing him to redecorate at will. *American Alien* is the result, and it's a bit of a mixed bag.

That's probably an inevitable result of the concept, which sees Landis using each of the seven issues to check in on Clark Kent at different stages of his life, working with new artists each time.

Because there's no connective narrative, with no unifying art style, the comic is inconsistent at its core. Issue 1 has a fine script, centred around young Clark dealing with his emerging powers, but terrible art, more amateur anime than the sort of look you'd launch a new book with. Issue 2 is better, a crime tale that sees a teenage Clark form his moral centre. Without getting into spoilers, Landis deals with some of the same issues he criticised *Man Of Steel* for, making some of the same "mistakes". Despite that oddness, it's strong, leaving you ready to explore some of the significant mythology shifts at its heart. But then Clark goes to a boat party in issue 3 (after being mistaken for Bruce Wayne, LOL) and the tone completely changes again. With more lows than highs, it's a hard book to rave about. **Sam Ashurst**



Silver Surfer

Reviewed: Issues 1–2
Writer: Dan Slott
Artists: Laura & Michael Allred
Publisher: Marvel
Format: Ongoing

★★★★

The numbering may be different, but rest assured, the new Silver Surfer volume brings the same pep and verve that made the last one a sleeper hit. Once again Dan Slott teams up with Michael and Laura Allred to create a psychedelic adventure inspired by the best of '50s sci-fi.

The concept is simple enough, with our titular hero still travelling around with small-town Massachusetts girl Dawn Greenwood. Slott's move to give Norrin Radd a human companion gives a great spin on the character, effectively turning Silver Surfer adventures into Marvel-flavoured *Doctor Who* romps. (Keep your eyes peeled for a lovely Tom Baker reference to top off the comparison).

The new volume sees Dawn and Norrin back on terra firma as the Silver Surfer faces off against imagination thieves and old enemies in a peppy opener. Silver Surfer pals Ben Grimm and Alicia Masters are also on hand to provide background colour on what is a great jumping-on point for new readers, just in time for the Surfer's 50th anniversary.

This is all backed up by sumptuous artwork from Laura and Michael Allred. The pair's upbeat cartoony aesthetic has always leant itself well to the more high energy and high concept entries in Marvel's stable and in *Silver Surfer*, they've found perfect vessel for their Kirby-equese style.

If you're looking for a fun breezy introduction to "cosmic" Marvel adventures, make sure to pick this up. **Carl Anka**

Spider-Man/Deadpool

Reviewed: Issue 1-3
Writer: Joe Kelly
Artist: Ed McGuinness
Publisher: Marvel
Format: Ongoing

★★★

In most Marvel team-up scenarios, you can rely on Spider-Man to be the chatty one, driving the more stoic heroes to distraction. But there's no way that even Spidey can out-chatter the Merc With The Mouth. Instead, Spider-Man is forced to be the mature adult when Deadpool decides to start hanging out with him in order to learn how to be a better hero. Little does Spidey know that Deadpool's actually been hired to assassinate Peter Parker – except no-one told him that Spidey and Parker are the same person. Shenanigans and penis jokes inevitably ensue.

The art by Ed McGuinness is dynamic and expressive – quite a feat considering that both leads are wearing full-face masks – and writer Joe Kelly gets as close to the wire as Marvel will allow with the genitalia-obsessed Deadpool's dialogue. It's not at the R-rated level of the *Deadpool* film, but it's close enough.

Deadpool here is also close to the film version of the character – weird as hell, but likeably earnest and devoted to those he loves. This is perhaps a more intelligent and linear-minded Deadpool than you're used to. He doesn't break the fourth wall, but he does dry-hump Spidey from time to time.

The only downside to *Spider-Man/Deadpool* is that, inevitably, Spidey is cast as the killjoy and his usual wit and charm are lost. The fun of Spidey-Deadpool team-ups is always Spider-Man's resistance to them, but that could be better balanced with his sense of humour. **Abigail Chandler**

Cry Havoc

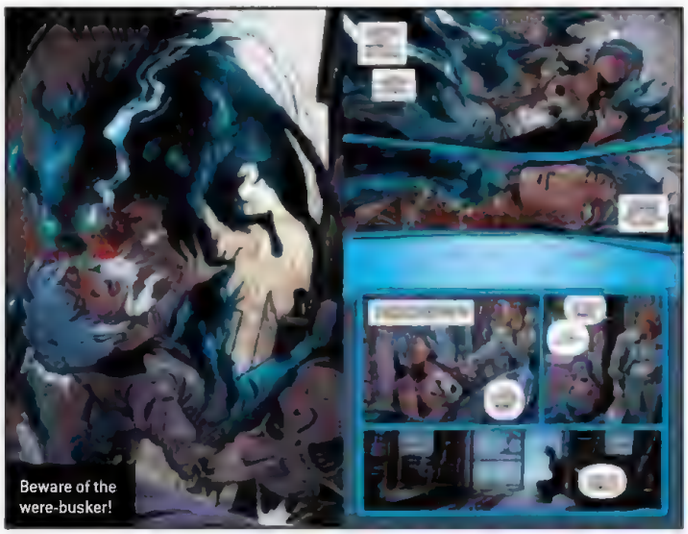
Reviewed: Issues 1-2
Writer: Simon Spurrier
Artist: Ryan Kelly
Publisher: Image
Format: Ongoing

★★★★

The elevator pitch for this comic is, in writer Si Spurrier's own words, "lesbian werewolf goes to war." *Cry Havoc*, though, is far more complex and nuanced than that, subtly teasing out its myths and mysteries.

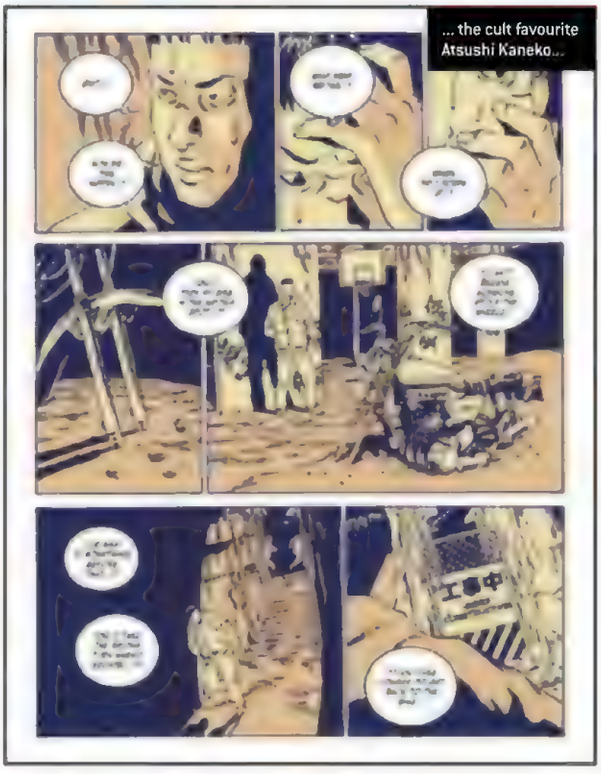
Louise Canton lives in hip Hackney and scrapes a living (pun intended) as a violinist, busking and playing in a band. That's until she is attacked and savaged outside the Old Bailey by a huge, doglike anthropoid monster. Soon enough she's indulging in the traditional bloody lycanthropic nocturnal shenanigans, which she wakes up with only a hazy recollection of.

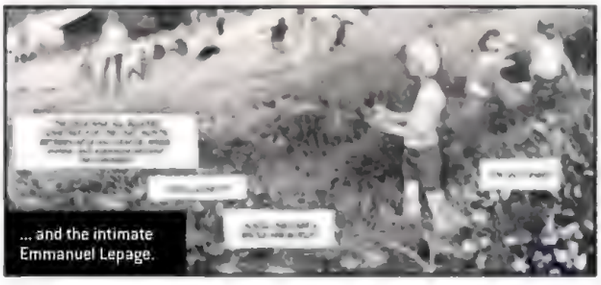
Quickly recruited to a private-contractor team of international were-monsters, Lou finds herself helicoptered into Afghanistan on the trail of Lynn Odell, an American "rendition specialist" – read: torturer – who has gone rogue. Odell is herself were-afflicted, but her reasons for turning on her paymasters have yet to be fully revealed.



Spurrier adopts an interesting three-part structure to tell his story. The "Beginning" sections show Lou immediately before and after the attack which transforms her, the "Middle" sections detail the mission in Afghanistan, and the "End" sections see Lou held prisoner and interrogated by Odell. The narrative chops and changes between the three, each of which is coloured by a different colourist – respectively, Nick Filardi, Matt Wilson and Lee Loughridge – using individual palettes to help distinguish them.

Ryan Kelly's art is shaggy and visceral, appropriate for a tale that delves deep into were-creature folklore and mines it for gory gold. **James Lovegrove**

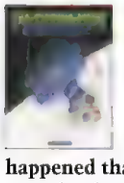




The Tipping Point

Writer: Various
Artist: Various
Publisher: Humanoids
Format: Anthology

★★★★★



Life can turn on a pin. One minute you're happy in the routine of your day-to-day existence, the next something has happened that has changed you completely and unexpectedly.

The Tipping Point chronicles these moments. It's an anthology of 13 tales, broad in scope and very varied in style, all elegantly presented by Humanoids.

"Hannako's Fart" by Taiyo Matsumoto opens the book with a tale that begins with the titular guff and closes on the world turning, having taken in life, death and baseball. It's a quiet, intimate tale and Matsumoto's art – focussed almost entirely on human faces and expressions – is powerfully emotive.

This is followed by Emmanuel Lepage's "The Awakening", a coming-out story told in monochrome save for the psychedelic beads of colour that represent the young protagonist's changing world.

The book isn't simply quiet, emotional vignettes, however. Naoki Urasawa's "Solo Mission" mashes up its futuristic setting with the mundanity of family life. It feels like an extended Future Shock – complete with a daft, but amusing, sting in the tail. Frederik Peeters' "Laika", meanwhile, sees the titular space dog return to Earth with vengeance in mind, and Bastien Vivès' monochrome "The Child" is a pared-down, deliciously creepy horror story.

Picking favourites is difficult. Paul Pope's "Consort To The Destroyer" is an oblique little tale, but his art, which lands somewhere between Hergé and Jack Kirby, is astounding. The duo of Bob Fingerman's "The Unbeliever" and Boulet's "I Want To Believe", meanwhile, make for a genuinely funny mid-section. The latter in particular is a hilarious shaggy dog story that asks, "What if everything you read on the internet were true?"

Diverse in tone and mood, *The Tipping Point* is a beautiful book. It's also very accessible. You could hand this to someone who has only ever read American comics and they would get it just fine. In that sense it's as much a wonderful entry point to the wider worlds of comics, manga and bandes dessinées as it is a lavish treat for more seasoned readers. **Will Salmon**

> "AN ENTRY POINT TO COMICS, MANGA AND BANDES DESSINÉES, AND A LAVISH TREAT"

Irmina

Writer: Barbara Yelin
Artist: Barbara Yelin
Publisher: SelfMadeHero
Format: Graphic novel

★★★

Barbara Yelin's Irmina, translated from German into English for the first time, tells the story of an ordinary German woman's life as Hitler rises to power. It also functions equally as a timely study of the white moderate.

In his 1963 Birmingham address, Martin Luther King expressed his disappointment at the inherent apathy of those who would consider themselves allies to the causes of justice, those "more devoted to 'order' than to justice". And so it goes for Irmina, as reduced means and an increasingly tumultuous political landscape force her to leave her studies and board in England, and leave behind her friend Howard, to return to Germany.

Initially determined to go back, her gradual capitulation and marriage to an SS officer are shown to be curiously lacking in qualms or fear; a tunnel-vision sense of self-preservation erases all else. Juxtaposed against the suffering of the Jewish people and Howard's existence as a black man in 1930's Britain, Irmina's 'plight' is difficult to sympathise with. She chooses to ignore what's going on around her in order to survive: a passive choice, but a choice nonetheless. Her belief is she can do nothing, so she does nothing.

It is no doubt an easier stance in retrospect, but in a world deeply mired in hateful rhetoric and the politics of divisiveness it feels acutely pertinent: what is the point at which intervention is required, and to whom does it fall, if not 'ordinary people.'

Zainab Akhtar

Shaft: Imitation Of Life

Reviewed: Issues 1-2
Writer: David F Walker
Artist: Dietrich Smith
Publisher: Dynamite
Format: 4-part series

★★★★

Sub-titled "Imitation Of Life", is David Walker's follow-up to *Shaft: A Complicated Man* influenced by the REM song of the same name? The comic is based more closely on the Ernest Tidyman books than the '70s movies, but it's certainly cinematic and the song's "sugarcane" and "Hollywood" chorusing is a good fit. And as John Shaft ruthlessly takes out the bad guys, the song could almost be his theme tune: "This lightning storm, this tidal wave, this hurricane, I'm not afraid" – something of a departure from the character's more familiar eponymous Isaac Hayes track.

The comic is a worthy, high-quality sequel to the previous *Shaft* comic. Matthew Clark's pulpy front covers are nicely "distressed" to look like old paperback books, replete with coffee (and other, less noticeable) stains, and although the logo is lifted straight from the debut 1971 movie, it did find its way onto new print runs of the novels, looking to exploit the success of the films.

The comic itself is less gritty but looks great, with Dietrich Smith's clean lines and ordered compositions creating arguably a more modern impression than the cover might have led you to expect. Issue 2 adds some excellent across-the-spread work, strangely absent from issue 1, although the action scenes in both issues have an awkward look, particularly the fisticuffs in issue 1.

Walker's dialogue is excellent, and by issue 2 there are already several threads running through the enjoyable script. There's obvious pain in Shaft, but he hides it well and it's easy to find yourself rooting for him; he's on the side of the angels, really.

Whether Walker's dialogue is particularly true to the era is hard to say; the comic doesn't really resemble the 1970s (or, at least, the '70s as depicted through the prism of Hollywood at any rate) – so perhaps it's an imitation of life. Does this matter? Not especially. The story gallops along, and you'll be in it for the long haul. **Rob Lane**

The Walking Dead

Reviewed: Issues 145–151
Writer: Robert Kirkman
Artist: Charlie Adlard
Publisher: Image
Format: Ongoing

★★★½

"There's something wrong with all of us." Those seven words, uttered by Rick Grimes as he comforts a weeping Michonne, sum up the latest arc of Robert Kirkman's ever-rolling series with bleak perfection. It's a grim sentiment, and one that permeates the citizens of Alexandria, the Hilltop and the Kingdom as *The Walking Dead* strides towards its landmark 150th issue.

The fact that we don't see hide nor decomposing hair of the shuffling deceased for six whole issues gives you some idea of where the aftermath of The Whisperers' warning in #144 takes us. The death of 12 familiar faces has driven poison deep into the veins of Alexandria's community, and the way that Kirkman and Charlie Adlard build up tension – the dialogue-free funeral montage, Rick's attempts to placate a community demanding retribution, and page-filling shots of Maggie and Eugene, their darker sides exposed – builds a web of cracks that multiply with every panel.

Six wordless pages at the start of #146 brilliantly encapsulate the tragedy that has struck this peaceable community. *TWD* can sometimes be guilty of not placing enough attention on the smaller characters in its pantheon, but here, with each page split into three, long, shadow-rich panels, we see Adlard's rough, black-and-white style at its strongest as we peer into their fragmented grief. Those turning point double-page spreads also make a welcome return.

Then Kirkman throws back in the ultimate doubt-conjurer, Negan. The prisoner down below, still waggling his tongue with all the grace of a swinging Lucille, becomes Rick's unlikely agony uncle. Best of all, #150 manages to subvert expectations with its outcome, delivering a story of all-too-familiar personal apocalypse that threatens to do more damage than a roamer ever could. And with #151 laying down some tantalising new mysteries, *TWD* could well be spooling up for another series-defining chapter.

Dom Reseigh-Lincoln

> "'THERE'S SOMETHING WRONG WITH ALL OF US' SUMS UP THIS ARC WITH BLEAK PERFECTION"

Goldtiger

Writer: Louis Shaeffer
Artist: Antonio Barreti
Publisher: Rebellion
Format: Graphic novel

★★★★★

Comics historians have long argued over *Goldtiger*, the Swingin' Sixties newspaper strip which, in the opinion of some, rivalled *Modesty Blaise*. As Peter O'Donnell's spy-caper comic gets all the plaudits and the handsome reissue collections, *Goldtiger* languishes in obscurity, its lack of renown not aided by the fact that it saw publication in just a handful of little-known European magazines and dailies. There are those, indeed, who believe that it never existed, that it is all just some postmodern joke dreamed up by retro-loving pranksters. As if!

Happily, we now have unimpeachable proof that *Goldtiger* did exist, thanks to the diligent efforts of Guy Adams and Jimmy Broxton, who have unearthed the strip's first storyline, "The Poseidon Complex", in its entirety and present it to us in this volume along with an abundance of fascinating ancillary material. The tale sees fashion designers

and international adventurers Lily Gold and Jack Tiger foil the nefarious plans of a Bondian supervillain called Sobek, but just as enjoyable are the insights into the creative tensions between jaded British writer Louis Shaeffer and temperamental Italian artist Antonio Barreti, which gave *Goldtiger* much of its piquancy but also meant the strip was doomed pretty much from the outset. We learn, too, about the controversy caused at the time by *Goldtiger*'s open-minded attitude to homosexuality and about the abortive attempt to relaunch it as a sci-fi series in the nascent *2000 AD* with inking input from Dave Gibbons, no less.

This book is a weirdly compelling artefact from a bygone era and an essential part of any true comics fan's collection. Only a square would think that it's all just some strikingly clever, wildly hilarious and expertly-realised pastiche. **James Lovegrove**

The Shield

Reviewed: Issues 1-2
Writer: Chuck Wendig and Adam Christopher
Artist: Drew Johnson, Ray Snyder and Al Barrionuevo
Publisher: Archie/Dark Circle
Format: Ongoing

★★★★☆

Novelists Adam Christopher and Chuck Wendig unite for this new take on classic Dark Circle character The Shield – inevitably dubbed a "female Captain America" by some. In fact, the original Shield actually predates other flag-draped heroes.

The series centres on Victoria Adams, the latest incarnation of The Shield – an unkillable woman whose sole purpose for centuries has been to protect America. Now, with only a vague memory of who she is, Adams finds herself caught between a detective who wants to help her

and a mysterious FBI agent who's hunting her. Except it might not be as simple as that...

The series doesn't hang around – issue one plunges you straight into the action and doesn't overload things with exposition. By the end of issue two the status quo is still fluid, keeping readers on their toes and pulling off some genuine surprises.

Series artist Drew Johnson certainly knows his way around superheroic women, having previous served as the penciller on both *Wonder Woman* and *Supergirl*. In his hands *The Shield* is full of strong, dynamic action sequences and heroines you believe could kick your ass.

Both dialogue and narration are handled with a light, authentic touch, and while comparisons to Captain America are unavoidable, this new flag-wearing superhero seems like she's going to be a little more morally grey than ol' Cap. Blind patriotism just doesn't fly in this modern day, and it looks like this series could throw up some interesting questions about who the heroes really are. **Abigail Chandler**

The Steam Man

Reviewed: Issues 1-5
Writer: Mark Alan Miller and Joe R Lansdale
Artist: Piotr Kowalski
Publisher: Dark Horse
Format: 5-issue miniseries

★★☆☆☆

***Steam Man* is marketed, and begins, as a steampunk sci-fi adventure.** By the end of its first issue, however, it's already throwing in a horror element and the story takes a different, and ultimately disappointing, turn. The reader starts out hoping for Victoriana robots punching invading aliens, but ends up with a weak and disjointed gore-fest.

Issue one is jumbled and can't quite seem to decide its tone when jumping between timelines, with the dialogue equally letting this interesting premise down. It's stilted, and every other line has someone swearing or flinging insults, seemingly trying to hammer home "this is a comic for grown-ups". In actuality, it jars the flow and quickly becomes tedious rather than comical.

Characterisation is also poor: a Native American character is apparently there to just look mystical and act as a guide for the main character; and the female characters are purely there as cannon fodder.

The best thing in the comic by far is Piotr Kowalski's artwork and Kelly Fitzpatrick's excellent colour. The copper palette really complements the art, looking gritty yet operatic on every page – a great example of colourist and artist working in tandem. But the excellent art isn't enough to make up for the lacklustre story, weak stereotypes and clunky dialogue. **Sara Westrop**

The Steam Man crew attempt witty banter.

What's the collective noun for a gathering of Robins?

Grayson

Reviewed: Issues 12-16
Writer: Tim Seeley and Tom King
Artist: Mikel Janín
Publisher: DC
Format: Ongoing

★★★★★

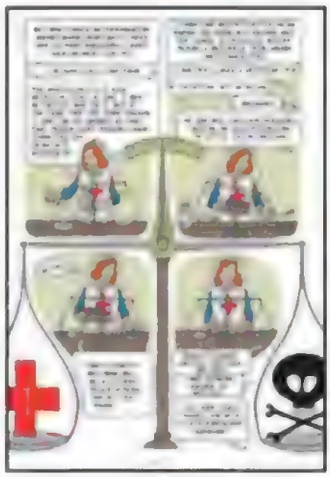
Dick Grayson carries a lot of baggage. He's the original Robin, tainted by *Batman*'s derided silly period in the '60s. Packed off to college in the '70s, his absence led to Batman becoming the Dark Knight – most fans' favourite incarnation. He's not just in the worst *Batman* movie, he's part of the title. But Grant Morrison, during his mission to make every crazy era of *Batman* canon, saw the potential in a character with as much experience as Bruce, drafting him as Batman post-*RIP*, giving him a blend of toughness and kindness that made him the most likeable man in Gotham.

Now that version of Grayson is undergoing his most extreme transformation yet, from kick-ass vigilante to charismatic superspy.

Mixing the psychedelic style of *The Invisibles* with the epic set-pieces of *Batman Incorporated*, *Grayson* is the best book Morrison never wrote. But this huge compliment does Seeley and King a disservice. They add their own flair, including the strong (occasionally silly) humour that forms *Grayson*'s spine.

If you haven't tried it, issue 12 is the most recent starting point, featuring Dick going home to catch up with amnesiac Bruce. Then he's back in action for 13 –14, taking a foray into *Robin War* for issue 15, before issue 16 turns the book into a brilliant buddy-cop Bond flick.

Going from gleeful to bleak and back, *Grayson*'s pure fun has an undercurrent of darkness keeping it constantly cool. Highly recommended. **Sam Ashurst**



Agatha: The Real Life Of Agatha Christie

Writer: Anne Martinetti
Artists: Guillaume Lebeau and Alexandre Franc
Publisher: SelfMadeHero
Format: Graphic novel

★★★½

For a book about the celebrated Queen of Crime, this new biography in comic form doesn't offer a great deal of mystery. Instead it's a walk-through the life of a rather astounding woman who served as a nurse in World War One, loved to fly, travelled the world and, in the process, became the best-selling novelist of all time.

Beginning with her puzzling 11 day disappearance in December 1926, Martinetti, Lebeau and Franc guide us through a life less ordinary, skirting her inspirations and successes, relationships, family and most famous works, sticking to fact, while introducing her fastidious Belgian Detective Hercule Poirot as a sort of (occasionally unwelcome) framing device.

An entertaining read for fans of detective fiction, this hardly pushes the boundaries of storytelling. That said, it's very accessible and would make a great biography for younger readers with a taste for crime lit. Simply illustrated and coloured, in panels reminiscent of The New Yorker from the first half of the 20th Century, it favours clarity and complete-ism over aesthetic flair. Christie's big hits, achievements and characters all crop up (and there's a handy timeline and bibliography at the back) which means that this would make a useful handbook for students of Christie, a year after the celebrations of the 125th Anniversary of her birth in 1890.

Entertaining but perhaps not quite the paean it could have been to a woman whose narrative agility defined a genre forever.

Rosie Fletcher

Deus Ex Universe: CHILDREN'S CRUSADE

Reviewed: Issue 1
Writer: Alex Irvine
Artist: John Aggs
Cover: Yohann Schepacz, Michaël Verhaaf, Alex Ronald
Publisher: Titan
Format: 5-issue miniseries

★★★☆☆

2000's cyberpunk conspiracy game *Deus Ex* has spawned a "universe" of novels, apps and other spinoffs. This release is itself a prelude to upcoming game sequel *Mankind Divided*. Thankfully the comic's enjoyable as a standalone sci-fi adventure.

Cyber-augmented people and natural humans are at each other's throats; Interpol has founded Task Force 29 to tackle threats from both sides. Adam Jensen is its latest recruit and this first mission is to rescue children kidnapped by a group of anti-aug extremists.

Jensen himself is a contradictory fellow, waffling about having to blend into the team then disobeying orders and going all Rambo. The art is vibrant, the narrative has momentum and plenty of gunfire, and the dialogue boasts zeitgeisty references to terrorism and the media. It's an uncomplicated action story but it has the potential to build into an exciting, paranoid thriller.

Dave Bradley

An Android Awakes

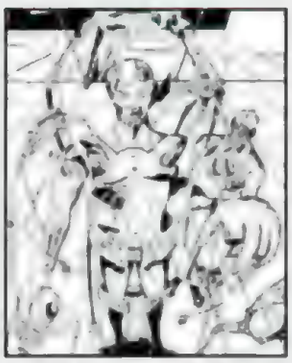
Writer: Mike French
Artist: Karl Brown
Publisher: Elsewhen Press
Format: Graphic novel

★★★★☆

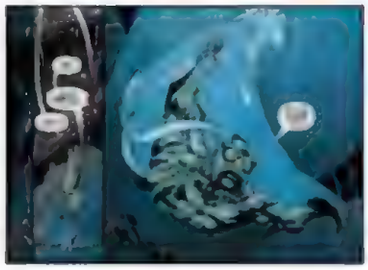
Mike French and Karl Brown's illustrated novel (and it is more of a novel than a standard comic) is a dizzying trip through fractured fictional realities. Android Writer PD121928 is trying to get a story accepted by the Android Publishing Program. He's had knockbacks so far, which wouldn't be a problem if he didn't only have a limited number of chances before he is deactivated forever...

French's story is bizarre and funny, with more than a dash of Philip K Dick and *2000 AD*'s satirical bite in its DNA, while Brown's numerous black and white illustrations and double-page spreads are crisp and futuristic.

Will Salmon



Leaving Megalopolis: Surviving Megalopolis



Reviewed: Issues 1-3
Writer: Gail Simone
Art: J. Calafiore
Publisher: Dark Horse
Format: 6-part series

★★★★★

***Leaving Megalopolis* might have been a high-concept mash-up of every post-*Marvelman* super book, spliced with *The Walking Dead* and *Escape From New York*, but boy it was a page-turning blast.**

The fact that Gail Simone had to crowdfund to get this sequel off the ground is all the more remarkable, given the stellar results.

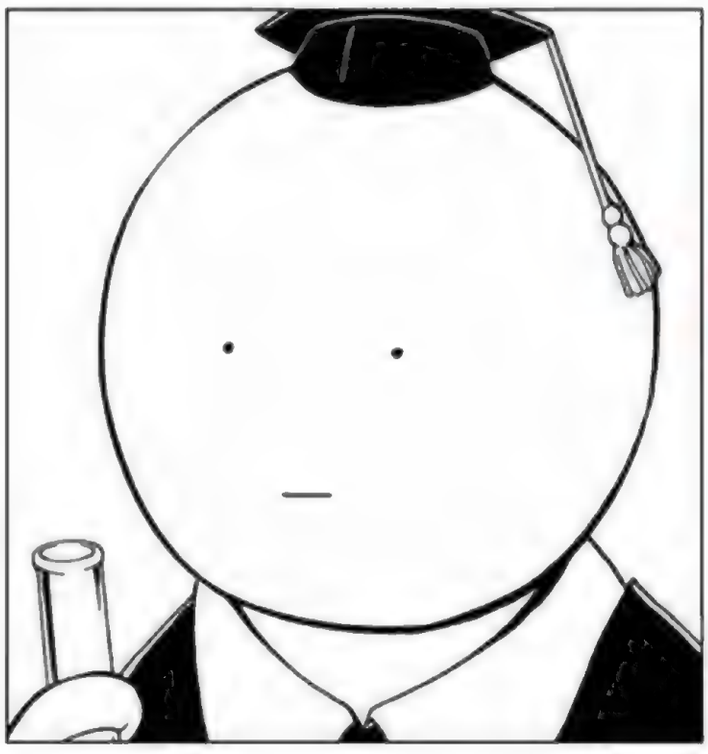
Surviving Megalopolis follows immediately on from the last scene in Book One, which saw our motley crew of Megalopolis residents escape the City's "afflicted" superheroes. Simone and Calafiore thrust you straight back into the action. With female lead Mina (a nod to Alan Moore's League member, perhaps?) missing and presumed dead, the remaining escapees join a small team of specialists who have been handpicked to rescue their benefactor's husband from the City – the idea being that they will also retrieve Mina at the same time.

It's an unrelenting ride with plenty of surprises to augment the action. The exposition, Congressional hearings and childhood flashbacks never slow the pace, and chances are you'll charge through the series with the speed of Simone's Flash-analogue, Fleet.

Speaking of whom, Fleet is a fabulously realised speedster: super-skinny because he's moving too fast to stop and eat, with a skeletal grin revealed by his broken helmet. In fact, all of Simone's 'analogue-lite', supers are great fun, and they're all bastards – except for one...

You might have thought that there was nothing new left to add to the dog-eared superhero genre, but Simone has found a great angle, even it does involve borrowing heavily from what has gone before. That *Surviving Megalopolis* manages to better its predecessor is an even bigger achievement. **Rob Lane**

Assassination Classroom



Reviewed: Volume 8
Writer: Yusei Matsui
Art: Yusei Matsui
Publisher: Viz
Format: Manga

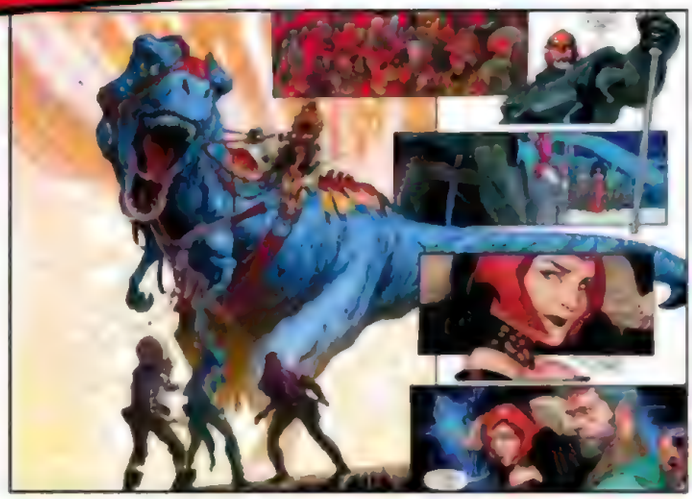
★★★☆☆

There reaches a point in many a manga series where a to-date interesting narrative begins to lose momentum. Such is the case in the eighth *Assassination Classroom*.

Previous volumes established the premise of a strange emoji-faced, tentacled monster who has threatened to blow up the Earth unless he's allowed to teach the students of class 3-E at Kunugigaoka Junior High School for a year. In that time the students will be afforded the chance to assassinate him. Once funny and affirming, the seeming thrust of the story of demoralised, 'cast aside' students realising their potential via unconventional tutelage is now stretching thin.

'Koro-sensei' – as his students refer to the monster – is relegated to the fringes, as the classmates face down another 'outside assassination' threat. The 'Game of Death' trope of infiltrating a building and combating foes level by level provides entertainment, and Matsui gets in some amusing digs at the medium, but it's a superficial engagement. His art is adept at comedic and dramatic flourishes, but the action drags due to an absence of tension: pattern informs the reader that the students will overcome, it's simply a question of how.

And if that's Matsui's intention – to keep the motives of Koro-sensei obscure and use the problem he presents as a means of focusing on his characters, the journey needs to be significantly more interesting than this one. **Zainab Akhtar**



Empress

Reviewed: Issues 1-2
Writer: Mark Millar
Artist: Stuart Immonen
Publisher: Icon/Marvel/Millarworld
Format: Three six-issue arcs

★★★★½

Set 65 million years in the past, *Empress* feels like it could have been tagged "a long time ago in a galaxy far, far, away..." as Millar and *Star Wars* artist Stuart Immonen create a high-octane space opera with maniacal despots, dinosaur death matches and high-impact spaceship chases.

As Queen Emporia and her children attempt to flee from the evil King Morax with the help of her bodyguard Dane, there's more than a hint of *A New Hope*. Millar's rapid fire, ultra-lean script allows Immonen to give the story an electrifying pace thanks to some truly stunning visuals. His figure work is exceptional, with the subtlest of cartooniness to the facial expressions giving every panel a sense of depth and emotion without relying on histrionics. The detailed designs of the ships and landscapes are also truly breath-taking and a sign of how much the artist has upped up his game working on Marvel's flagship titles.

With *Empress*, Millar is continuing to confound his critics by creating a book which is both a perfect example of his distinctive style, but also a million miles away from the clichéd expectations that come with it. A return to Marvel's Icon imprint sees him work in a more mainstream tone like *Ultimates* or his under-rated *Fantastic Four* run, than the throwback tales of *Huck* and *Starlight* or the self-aware world of *Jupiter's Legacy*, and in doing so he has created one of his best books in years. **Alex Thomas**

Porcelain: Bone China

Writer: Benjamin Read
Artist: Christian Wildgoose
Publisher: Improper Books

★★★★★

For their follow-up to *Porcelain: A Gothic Fairytale*, Benjamin Read and Christian Wildgoose have moved the story on by 15 years. Child has become Lady and mastered the art of creating the Porcelain automatons, but this brings her into conflict with the war-hungry General...

Lady has matured into a confident yet complex character. Her mistrust of outsiders after years in solitude is tested by love and money, and while the brattishness of youth has gone, it is replaced by a steely reserve and a refusal to be manipulated.

Read's story is reminiscent of the intelligent fantasies of Gaiman and Pullman, while Wildgoose's art mixes steampunk aesthetics with art nouveau flourishes and a meticulous eye for detail. **Alex Thomas**

The Violent

Reviewed: Issues 1-3
Writer: Ed Brisson
Artist: Adam Gorham
Publisher: Image
Format: Ongoing

★★★★

Brisson and Gorham's new crime monthly is a bleak look at the dark side of life in Vancouver. Ex-con Mason and his partner Becky are trying to build a new life together with their young daughter. But through a combination of bad luck, poor choices, an unjust system and the local low-lifes, the hapless family gets pulled back into some very bad situations.

It's a low-key, small-scale and potently "real" book – if at times so relentlessly dark that it edges towards self-parody. Still, Brisson's dialogue is always sharp and Gorham and Garland make a great combo. Gorham's figures are beaten-down and bedraggled, and Garland colours them in with various shades of bruise. **Will Salmon**

Sex Criminals
VOLUME THREE

Reviewed: Issues 11-14
Writer: Matt Fraction
Artist: Chip Zdarsky
Publisher: Image
Format: Ongoing

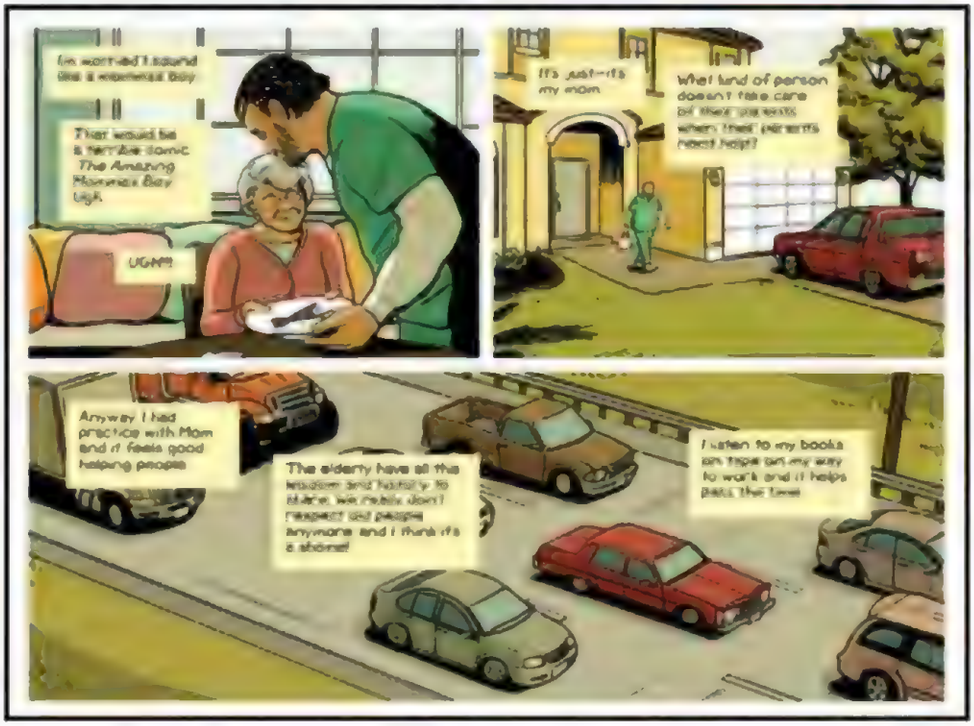
★★★★½

Bigger and bolder – that's *Sex Criminals*' third arc. Better? Not quite, but that's only because Fraction and Zdarsky's series has been so consistently spectacular throughout its run.

The third series sees Suzie and Jon still avoiding the attention of the Sex Police, while also trying to track down other people with their peculiar gift. The book has evolved from being just Jon and Suzie's story – if it was ever really that – and into something approaching a very strange, very rude and very funny team book.

That arguably comes at the cost of some of the focus. Volume Two was so laser-targeted at exploring the main duo's mental and emotional states that it really raised the book's game. In contrast, the bizarro funnies of Douglas's deadly anime orgasm fairy (no, really, that's a thing) feel a little lightweight, and the splintering storylines lead to a sense of plot drift.

That said, though, it remains one of the most consistently LOLable and humane comics on the market. Zdarsky and Fraction have an unerring way of making you quickly care about characters you barely know. The relationship between Douglas and his elderly mother is established in just a couple of panels, but conveys a depth of compassion while not stinting on the funnies. Best of all is the, ahem, climax of issue 14, as the comic collapses into a lengthy post-modern breakdown that sees Zdarsky and Fraction intrude into their own book to discuss why a scene isn't working. "Masturbatory," as they put it? Sure – but it's also funny as hell, with the final splash page a nice wink to the book's legion of loyal "Brimpers". **Will Salmon**


I'm worried I sound like a worried boy
That would be a terrible comic. The Amazing Hornless Boy. Ugh.
UGH!!
It's just—it's my mom
What kind of person doesn't take care of their parents when they're starting to need help?
Anyway I had practice with Mom and it feels good helping people
The elderly have all this wisdom and history to share, we really don't respect old people anymore and I think it's a shame!
I listen to my books on tape on my way to work and it helps pass the time

New #1s

House of Penance
Peter Tomasi's horror comic from Dark Horse gets off to a blisteringly scary start.

Lords Of The Jungle
Sheena dominates in the first issue of Bechko and Castro's retro adventure for Dynamite.

Roche Limit: Monadic
Moreci and Charles' sci-fi saga kicks off its final volume in grubby, apocalyptic style.

The Infinity Entity
It's cosmic strangeness ahoy in the fun first instalment of this Adam Warlock miniseries.

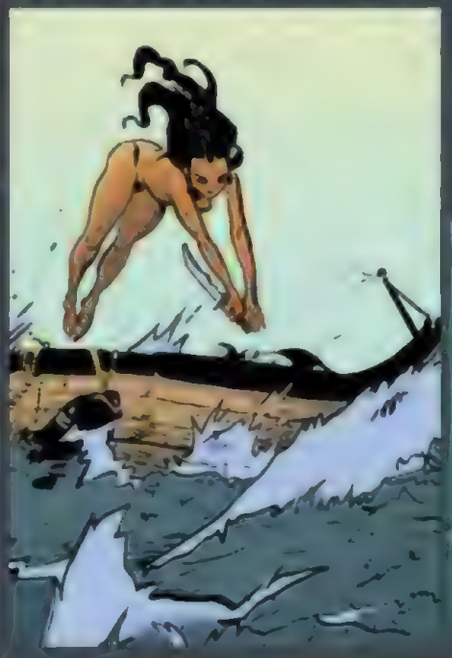
WIN!

ONE OF THREE COPIES OF THE TIPPING POINT

The Tipping Point presents stories by 14 incredible creators (see our 5 star review on page 125). Humanoids have kindly given us three copies to give away - with one including a sketch by superstar artist Eddie Campbell!

To be in with a chance of winning one of three copies of the book, simply answer this question: **Eddie Campell worked on which graphic novel with Alan Moore?**

Simply head to this link: https://www.futurecompetitions.com/tippingpoint/ and submit the correct answer.



TERMS & CONDITIONS: Enter the Comic Heroes Tipping Point competition online at www.futurecompetitions.co.uk/tippingpoint between 8 April 2016 and midnight 8 July 2016. Prize is as stated and cannot be transferred or refunded No cash alternative will be offered. This competition is only open to people aged 18 or over. The winners will be selected at random from all the correct entries received between the relevant dates and winners will be notified within 28 days of the closing date. Winners will be required to give details of a delivery address in the UK to which prizes should be sent. Free entry, as well as full terms and conditions, are available online at www.futurecomps.co.uk/bouncer, but please note that we cannot accept postal entries. Unless otherwise stated, Comic Heroes competitions are open to all UK residents of 18 years and over, except employees of: (a) the company; (b) any third party appointed by the Company to organise and/or manage the Competition; and (c) the Competition sponsor(s). By entering this competition, you consent to us using your personal details to send you information about products and services of Future which may be of interest to you.

Ready to play

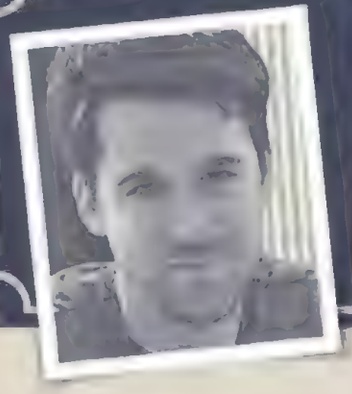
Discover the new look Official Xbox Magazine

AVAILABLE NOW OR ORDER DIRECT FROM MYFAVOURITEMAGAZINES.CO.UK/GAMING

CREATING INDEPENDENT COMICS

Comics writer and editor **Mike Garley** continues his guide to creating and publishing your own indie comics

PART THREE: CROWDFUNDING



Mike Garley is a writer of comics, games, screenplays and other such cool stuff. Mike wrote beActive Media's Emmy nominated comic series ***Collider***, as well as ***Wallace and Gromit***, ***Adventure Time***, ***Eponymous***, ***The Kill Screen*** and ***The Samurai Slasher***.

One of the biggest of all challenges for most aspiring creators is raising the funds needed to produce a comic. In this article we'll focus on two of the many crowdfunding platforms that you can use to raise funds.

Crowdfunding has rapidly become an increasingly viable alternative to financially and emotionally crippling debt. But before we begin, it's probably best to state the obvious. You need to remember to do these three important things.

1 DO YOUR RESEARCH

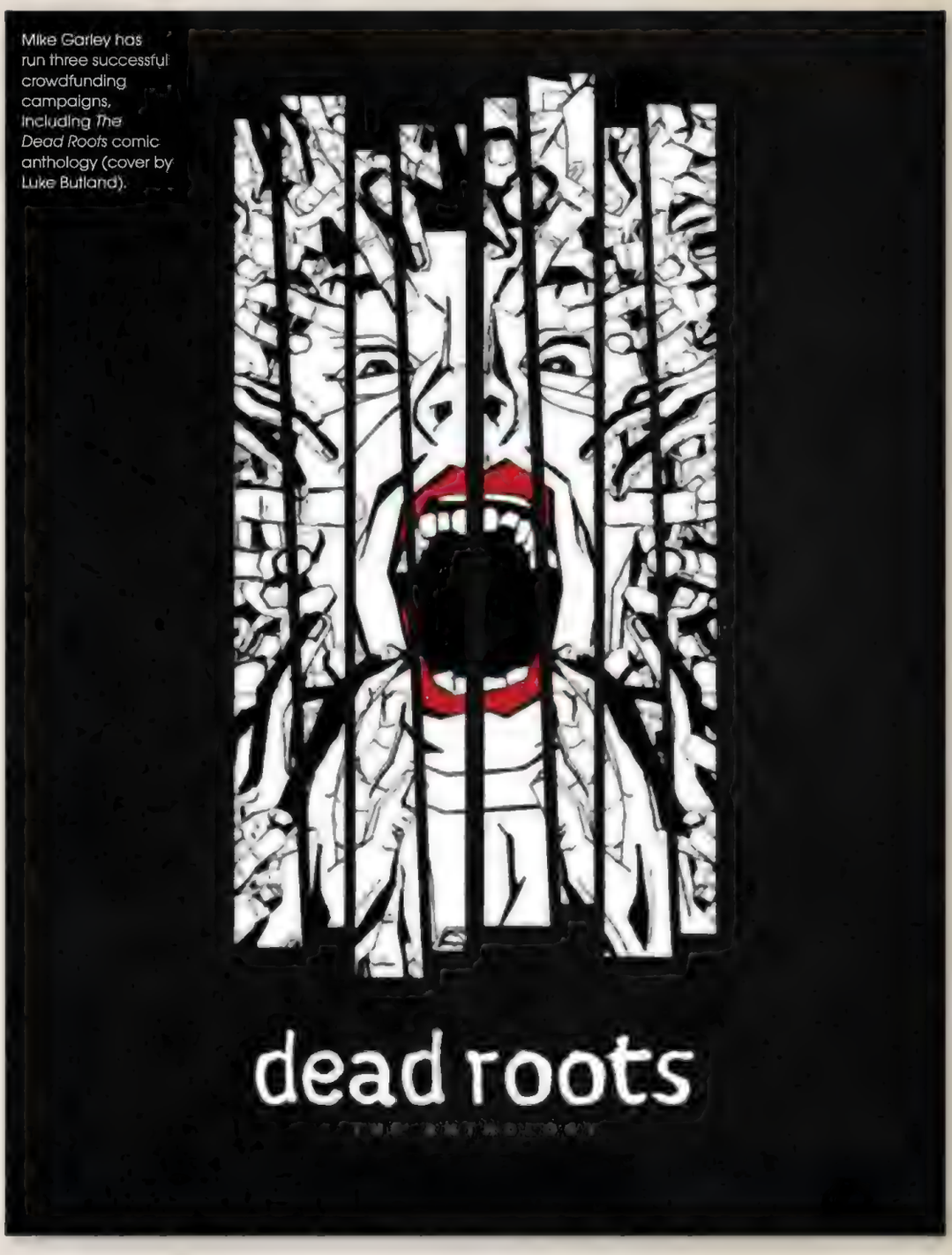
All of the crowdfunding sites have plenty of information about how they work and what the risks are. Review it before starting your project. They want you to succeed!

2 BE REALISTIC

It's important to look at other similar projects, and not just those that have succeeded but those that have failed too. Learn from them.

3 PUT IN THE LEG WORK

You'll need to commit a hell of a lot of time to promoting your campaign before and during the funding period. This isn't a get-rich-quick scheme.



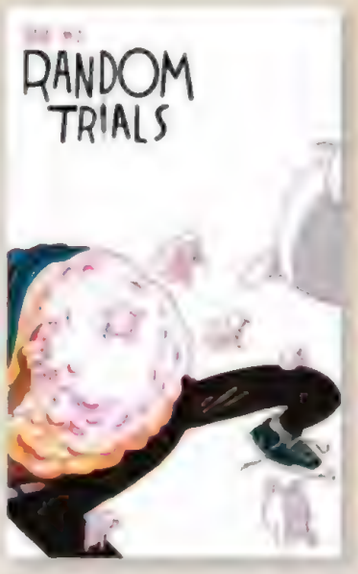
Mike Garley has run three successful crowdfunding campaigns, including *The Dead Roots* comic anthology (cover by Luke Butland).

We'll focus on Kickstarter and Indiegogo, because whereas online platforms like Patreon offer creators the opportunity to receive financial support on an ongoing basis (a bit like a subscription service), they generally rely on you having an existing fanbase, and for that reason are not the type of platform I'd recommend to new creators. Note: please see the previous issue's disclaimer about not being afraid to do your own thing.

The strength of sites such as Kickstarter, Indiegogo, and lesser known alternatives is that they allow you to reach a global audience, so no matter how niche your comic may be, you can almost certainly get it in front of "the right type of people", which is something that otherwise can be extremely hard to do with an independent comic. With this increased visibility, however, you'll be competing against a wealth of other great projects. You'll need to make sure your project stands out.

Deciding what platform to use is an important decision, and will be down to what suits you and your project. Unlike Kickstarter, Indiegogo allows "flexible funding," which means that even if you don't reach your target you'll still receive all of the funds. On the other hand, Indiegogo's flexible funding option isn't without its flaws... »

"If you opt to enter into the 'flexible funding' option with Indiegogo, contributors can make their pledges using US credit cards. If your receiving account (where the money is being paid to) is outside of the US, then you'll get stung for wire transfer fees on top of the standard Indiegogo fees. At the time of writing this, that cost $25."
Dean Beattie



FACING PAGE The excellent *Random Trials* by Dean Beattie.

ABOVE LEFT Thanks to 30 backers, *Random Trials #1* made $1,048 (with flexible funding) on Indiegogo. This was 32% of the original $3,300 goal.

ABOVE, MIDDLE Backers pledged £822 to help bring *Random Trials #2* to life, smashing Dean's very conservative £300 Kickstarter goal.

ABOVE, RIGHT Building from the success of Dean's previous Kickstarter, *Random Trials #3* reached £2,713 on a £600 target.

Flexible funding raises the risk of putting you in a position where you've made a commitment but don't have enough funds to complete your project. If you've budgeted £3,000 for printing and receive only £200 of funding, then you'll still need to find the majority of the funds while having backers who are already counting on you.

The main strength of Kickstarter is its popularity within the UK, which can, if your campaign is well run, lead to more backers. And Kickstarter has a vibrant comic category – at the time of writing, Kickstarter has over 70 more projects live than Indiegogo.

Choosing which site to use is a decision that should not be taken lightly. Explore the sites and see which one would suit you and your project. Once you have decided which platform best suits you, you should familiarise yourself with it (and its community). You also need to consider these other important factors...

TIME MANAGEMENT

It's easy to underestimate how much time these campaigns can take. Crowdfunding is hard work. Seriously! You have to put in a lot of hours before, during, and after your project finishes. You need to take your time, and make sure all your bases are covered. The more comprehensive and polished your project is, the more likely it is that people will back it.

DON'T GET CARRIED AWAY

Just because crowdfunding offers a great way to receive financial support, that doesn't mean that you should dive straight in at the deep end and ask people to fund your 2,000-page robot-romance opus. You have to be realistic. Start small. You're going to be asking people to take a risk on you, so don't get carried away.

FINISHING YOUR COMIC

Crowdfunding has changed, and backers are getting increasingly picky (and rightly so) about which projects they back. Nearly everyone who has backed a few projects will have backed one that is still either uncompleted or perhaps has seemingly disappeared from the face of the planet.

For these reasons people are looking for projects that they can have faith will arrive in a timely manner. They'll be a lot more likely to back your project if it is either finished or is almost complete. Backers are a lot less likely to back you if you're asking people to pay you or your collaborators "page rates".

DO YOUR HOMEWORK

Learn from other people's mistakes. It's really easy to see what other people have done with their projects, what's worked, what hasn't. Check out what pledge levels they offered, what was popular, what wasn't? Be sure that you have enough affordable pledge levels as well as some really special higher tier pledges to offer. Look for "like-for-like" projects and compare yours with these. You should be competitive and offer good value for money – but when you do, make sure you take the next point into account...

GET YOUR FIGURES RIGHT

Lots of projects get this wrong (I did on my first Kickstarter). By trying to be too competitive you could end up turning a successful campaign into a >

SWOOP
WAIT!!
AARGH!
VROOOOOM

SWOOSH
SWOOP

AARGH!
KRASH
SAID
SWOOP

DUDE
DUDE
VEG
PAINT
SWEAR
SWEAR

disaster, which could result in you having... let's call it *an episode*.

Have you taken *all* your costs into consideration? Lots of people forget that they'll need to package items, and packaging isn't always cheap. And on top of that, packaging could actually increase the cost of your postage too.

You need to try to factor everything in. Personally I try to ensure that all my rewards will fit within the same package, so I don't offer large posters, or t-shirts, or mugs, as it can really complicate things. Instead you can offer such items as postcards, bookmarks, badges, digital perks, audio commentary, etc... Remember this for stretch goals too.

Your postage is one of your scariest costs – you need to know the size of the comic with all the potential extras in it, before working out exactly what size packaging you'll need for your postage costs.

Indiegogo and Kickstarter will also take a cut, too: factor that in at every pledge level.

PROMOTE YOUR CAMPAIGN

Bloggers and news sites should be contacted before you start your campaign. These guys can be really busy and might not be able to get to your email

LEFT The *Dead Roots* "project image" was updated every day so that when anyone shared the Kickstarter link there was a different visual, the aim being to generate a buzz and entice more people to take a look at the project.

ABOVE We took the trouble to make sure the logo and the general design aesthetic of the *Dead Roots* comic image was recognisable throughout our 30-day funding period to help us build and maintain momentum.

straight away, let alone have the time to write a review or an article. The more time you give them, the more likely it'll be that they'll be able to help. The first few days of your project – and the last – are the most important, and it's at these times that you need the most help, but you can't expect sites to cover you with zero lead time. Sites may actually do a follow-up or interview with you or give your project coverage too if you're sufficiently ahead of the game and they like what you're doing, so it's really important that you contact them as soon as you can.

PLAY TO YOUR STRENGTHS

There's lots of great comics out there, so if you can find a way to stand out, don't be afraid to do that. For my comic *The Samurai Slasher* (a slasher comic that focuses on a *Friday The 13th* style character), I launched it on... Friday the 13th. And in addition to that it only ran for 13 days, compared to the more conventional 30 day period. This helped build a bit of intrigue as well as latching onto the excitement of Friday the 13th.

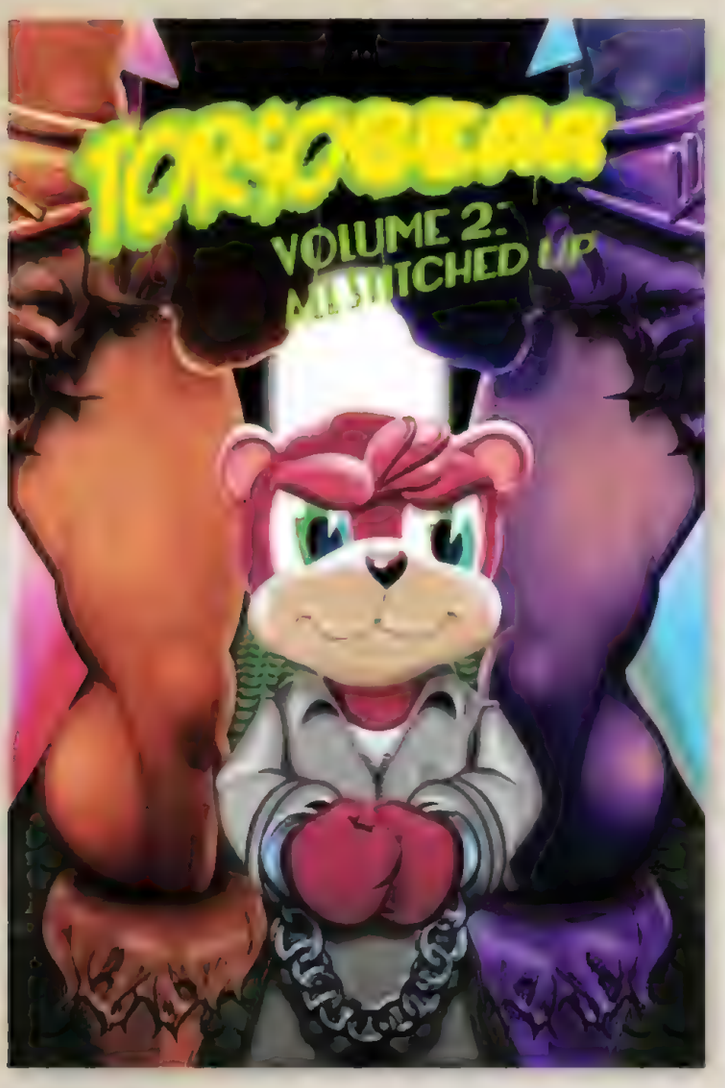
Think about who your comic will appeal to, and see if you can do anything to help yourself reach them.

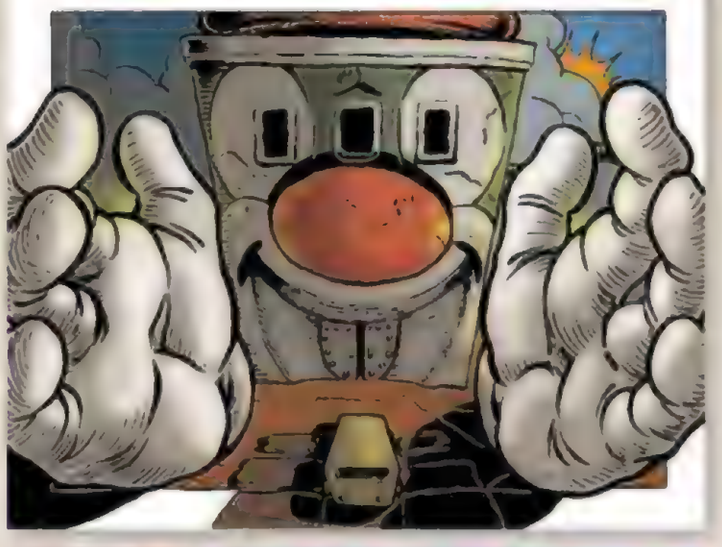
KEEP PROMOTING!

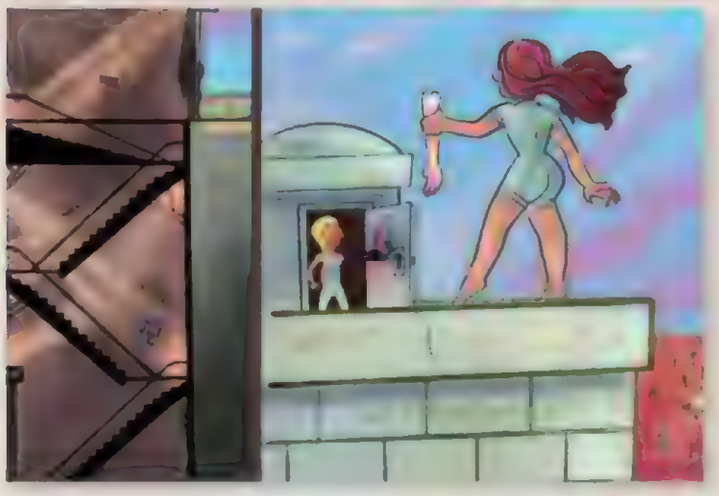
One of the hardest challenges is maintaining momentum during your campaign. Lots of people bombard their Facebook and Twitter accounts during their funding period, which should help maximise the number of people – of those you already know – that you'll reach with your campaign. But beware: this could also annoy the hell out of those who use social media frequently. Sharing different artwork, as well as updates that are worth reading, is another great way to keep people engaged. (Updates go out to people who are watching your campaign as well as those who have already backed your project.) This may also entice more people to back your project or, just as valuably, help you reach more people by sharing it.

BUILD A GREAT PAGE

As we've emphasised, the more comprehensive your project page is, the more likely it is that people will back you. But people are busy, and you also don't want to overload people with surplus information. People might be looking at your project on their phone in their lunch break. If they can't easily find all the information they really need, then the chances are they won't bother backing you. >







ABOVE Cover by Hal Laren for Brett Uren's *Torsobear 2: All Stitched Up*.

TOP RIGHT Art by Brett Uren.

ABOVE RIGHT Art by Ashley Ribblett. An unusual concept like *Torsobear* – a "cutesy crime anthology" – can struggle to find its audience, but creator Brett Uren says the contributing artists and writers all "got it".

BE HONEST

Be open about what you'll be using the funds for, and why you're crowdfunding. Continue to be honest as your campaign is run, and if you're successful, make sure you keep everyone up-to-date about how things are going, especially if there are going to be any delays. Explain why, and what you're doing to resolve them.

WHAT IF YOU FAIL?

If your project doesn't reach its target (and doesn't receive its funding), then that doesn't mean the platform is closed to you. Brett Uren's *Torsobear 2: All Stitched Up* failed to reach its target. Brett assessed where his project went wrong after it failed to hit its target, and after a short break (two weeks) he restarted his campaign.

During this time Brett took the trouble to keep all the backers up-to-date with what happened and made them feel engaged enough with the campaign that the majority of them backed the newly relaunched campaign.

> "Once we got going again with a new target and the samples of our new creators coming through almost daily, we blasted through to just under 50% funded in a week – it was like the funding drive had never stopped."
>
> **– Brett Uren**

CONCLUSION

Crowdfunding has been instrumental in the growth of the UK independent scene, and when it is used correctly it is a fantastic tool to help creators not only fund their new comics but also reach a wider audience than they might have had any realistic prospect of finding otherwise. We hope we've given you some helpful insights into how it works and, if it suits your project, some ideas to use for your own campaign too.

In the next issue we'll have a look at getting your comic printed, plus getting out there and exhibiting at comic cons.

REALLY FUNNY. SHARP. SMART AND LOOKS GREAT!
ROB WILLIAMS
(2000AD. MARTIAN MANHUNTER)

JAW-DROPPINGLY BEAUTIFUL... IF IT'S NOT THE MOST IMPORTANT SERIES OF RECENT TIMES. IT'S CERTAINLY THE MOST AMBITIOUS
STARBURST MAGAZINE

AN EARLY FRONT RUNNER FOR MY BREAK-OUT INDIE OF THE YEAR
COMIC BASTARDS

A PRIMAL SCREAM BURSTING TO GET THROUGH THE PAGES
GEEK SYNDICATE

UTTERLY FLAWLESS STUFF...THE VERY DEFINITION OF A 'CAN'T MISS' TITLE
BIG COMIC PAGE

I THINK THIS COMIC IS PLANNING TO KILL ME
MINDLESS ONES

A TRUE CLASSIC IN THE MAKING
BOOKMUNCH

A STUNNINGLY BEAUTIFUL WORK...COULD WELL BE BE THE UK COMIC OF THE YEAR
COMICS ALLIANCE

A TENSE. INTRIGUING PLOT THAT PROMISES FIREWORKS...THIS IS A COMIC THAT CLEARLY HAS SOMETHING TO SAY
BLEEDING COOL

REALLY STRONG CHRIS MORRIS-Y BLACK COMEDY. GET!
KIERON GILLEN
(THE WICKED + THE DIVINE)

BEAST WAGON

OWEN MICHAEL JOHNSON // JOHN PEARSON // COLIN BELL

CHAPTER THREE

ON SALE MARCH // CHAPTER ONE & TWO AVAILABLE NOW

WWW.CHANGELINGSTUDIOS.COM

STATE OF INDEPENDENTS

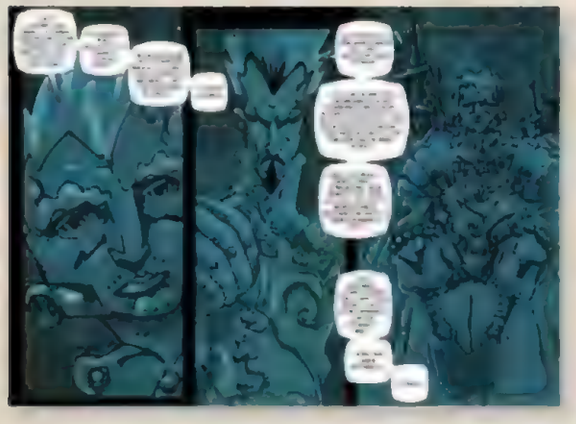
Miles Hamer picks out some of the best self-published comics right now. If you have created a comic, in print or online, we'd love to hear from you! Get in touch at stateofindependents@gmail.com

THE BRIDGE

Story & Art by Mal Earl
malearl.com

Originally written for radio, Mal Earl's moonlit blue one-shot tale of honour, duty and expectation is a distinctly literary piece, a philosophising rumination that utilises the works of WB Yeats and Will Allen Dromgoole. Was it the poetry that inspired the story or the other way around?

Explains Mal: "I'm constantly inspired by the works of Beckett, Pinter and Potter, and where Potter's songs infiltrate his teleplays, I think poetry serves a similar purpose in my work. It has an almost disconnected, yet intimately connected, attachment to the action taking place, hopefully adding an extra level of meaning to the scene without actually describing anything within the scene directly."

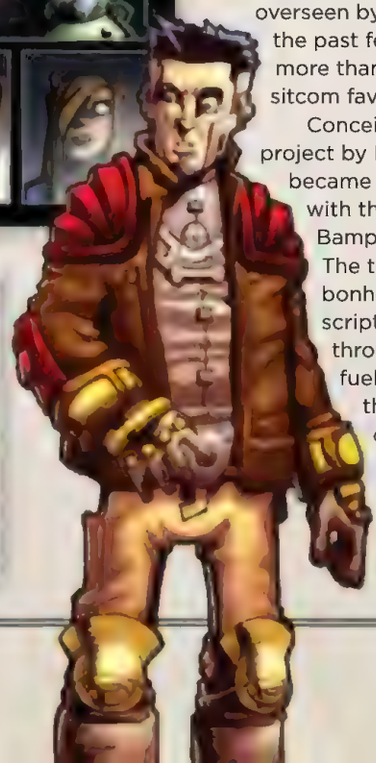


LOU SCANNON

Story & Art By Dan Harris, Kris Karter, and Jim Bampfield
atticstudios.website

Rampant space mercenary on the good ship Raging Hormone, the boyishly hopeless Lou Scannon is less Deadpool, more deadbeat. The punchline-heavy piratical adventures of his oddball crew thrum with the sort of self-effacing British humour overseen by a Tharg or two for the past few decades (with more than just a dash of cult sitcom favourite *Red Dwarf* too).

Conceived as an animation project by Dan Harris, the book became a comic collaboration with the involvement of Jim Bampfield and Kris Karter. The team's demonstrable bonhomie and pub scripting sessions bleed through Scannon's laugh-fuelled romps. Forming their own publishing outfit, the recently-launched Attic Studios, the team are now also working on a new title, *Bruce Outback*.



THE O MEN

Story & Art by Martin Eden
theomencomic.wordpress.com

Martin Eden, creator of *Spandex* – the rainbow-flavoured all-gay superteam title – has recently breathed life back into his Eagle-Award-nominated original creation, *The O Men*. A long-running superhero soap series of barbed interpersonal exchanges and moody monochrome, its focus is on dry, self-deprecating humour and character rather than splash pages and action set-pieces.

Martin explains the inspiration: "In my late teens, I started discovering Vertigo comics and it really sent my ideas in a different, more mature way. I originally made *The O Men* as just a six-issue series when I was at university, and it was reading *Sandman* that made me decide to re-do it and really sprawl the series out – to really get into the characters and storylines. I just wanted to create a comic that surprised people and shocked them. Something they'd have to re-read again when they know all the actual answers to the mysteries of the series."

RIPTIDERS!

Story & Art by Peter Nguyen
www.riptiders.com

An astonishing spectacle of awesomeness, Peter Nguyen's *Riptiders* is the comic that finally smashes together two sports we never knew we wanted combined: swimming and professional wrestling. The cheeky, turbo-charged futuristic aquatic battles pack not only a punch, but as many WWE references as your brain can handle. (Bobby "The Brine" Herring, anyone?)

Utilising concept art for an abandoned video game project, creator Peter Nguyen describes the writing process: "Instead of writing out a race, I book spots. I don't write dialogue, I literally get in front of a mirror and cut the promo and then write down what I liked. It just made sense to me, because I've never set foot into a writing class, but every week for my whole life I've watched wrestling." Sounds perfectly logical.

The feedback so far has been distinctly, erm, fishy. "The first question I got about their universe was, 'How do they have sex?' I think it's best to let the fandom foster its own theories on that matter."

ABOMINABLE GLORY

Story by Martin Hayes, Art by Chris Askham
markosia.com/graphic-novels/abominable-glory

Violent, pacy, and featuring salivatingly tangible artwork, *Abominable Glory* is a pulse-quickening read. Concerning a daring Himalayan WWII mission that takes a monstrously unexpected turn, Hayes and Askham's Boy's-Own-style caper even manages to add a layer of poignancy to the mayhem that belies the superficial thrill of all the bullets and blood.

Says writer Hayes: "It became apparent as I started loosely plotting the book that we could use it to examine the race element. I don't think you can really write a WWII story without examining those elements in some way, even subconsciously. But it was only as we went along that I realised that the marrow-deep racial hatred held by certain characters would play a big part in how the plot unfolds."

FRITESITE

Story & Art by Martin Malin
cepublishinggroup.com/fritesite

A jittery exercise in unpleasantness, this creepy compendium of ghastly tales evokes the chilly EC anthology titles of the '50s. Long Island based creator ME Malin says: "Horror stories, I believe, provide needed form and substance to the creepy, malevolent, and unseen entities that we *know* (and have known since we were kids) skulk about in the corners of every nighttime bedroom and mind. Short answer: I just like scary stuff!"

MY LIFE IN COMICS

GEORGE MANN

AUTHOR OF *DOCTOR WHO: THE EIGHTH DOCTOR*

THE FIRST COMIC I EVER READ

I grew up reading British comics such as *Buster*, *Whizzer & Chips*, *The Beano* and *The Dandy*. I still have a great fondness for them. The first American comic book I remember buying was the 1984 adaptation of *Star Trek III: The Search For Spock*. I read it until it fell apart.

THE FIRST INFLUENCE ON MY WORK

I certainly feel the influence of all the Batman stuff I read as a child, and see it impacting on the tone of my own work, but the first time I sat up and realised that comics weren't just about superheroes or TV/movie tie-ins was probably reading *Transmetropolitan*. I devoured those comics, and I think it was at that point that I decided I wanted to write comics, and not just consume them.

MY FIRST PROFESSIONAL COMICS WORK

The first professional scripts I wrote were for a creator-owned series based on my *Newbury & Hobbes* novels, but that project has turned out to have a very long gestation period, so no one's had chance to read them yet! My first published piece was a six-page *Doctor Who* short for Titan's first FCBD issue. It was a bit of a baptism of fire, trying to fit a whole *Doctor Who* story into just six pages!

MY FAVOURITE COMIC OF ALL TIME

Jeph Loeb and Tim Sale's *Batman: The Long Halloween*. I love everything about it, from the grand concept, to the realisation on the page. Sale's art is phenomenal, and Loeb plots it out just like a TV season. It's the Batman comic I always return to.

THE BEST COMIC I'VE WORKED ON

The Eighth Doctor miniseries I wrote for Titan. I'm a lifelong *Doctor Who* fan, and getting the chance to revisit Paul McGann's Doctor and give him his own series, with a new companion, was a dream come true. I really wanted each issue to feel like a new "episode" of a TV series that you've never seen. Emma Vieceli has done such a fantastic job bringing the scripts to life, too. I think the script for issue 4 is my favourite out of all of them.

THE CHARACTER I'D MOST LIKE TO WRITE FOR

Spider-Man is on my bucket list. If there's one thing I MUST do before my career is over, it's write for Spidey. Even if it's only a cameo.

THE COMICS I'M CURRENTLY READING

The Wicked + The Divine, *The Spire*, *This Damned Band*, *The Amazing Spider-Man*, *Batman*, *Batgirl*, *Velvet*, *Phonogram*, *2000 AD*. In fact, there's so much that I'm having trouble keeping up!

Doctor Who: The Eighth Doctor is out now from Titan.

Above: The Eighth Doctor lives again in George Mann's Titan miniseries, with art by Emma Vieceli.

MEET YOUR FAVOURITE STARS AT ROGUE EVENTS CONVENTIONS

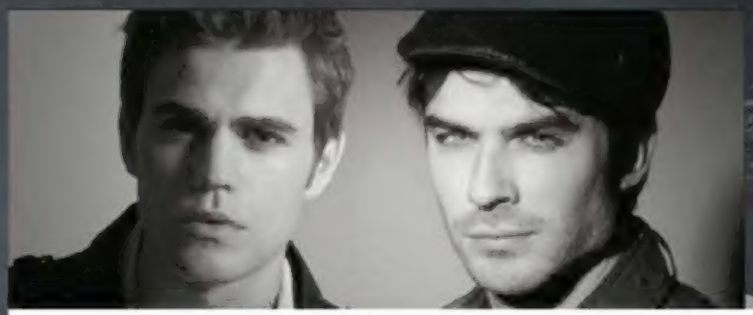
THE CITY OF HEROES #2

Heroes from Comic Book adaptations in TV Shows

13th – 15th May 2016

Hilton Birmingham Metropole Hotel

John Barrowman, Colton Haynes,
Danielle Panabaker, David Ramsey, Katie Cassidy,
Peyton List, Amy Gumenick, Tom Cavanagh,
Carlos Valdes, Keiynan Lonsdale ... and more tba.



INSURGENCE 8

The Vampire Diaries & The Originals

10th – 12th June 2016

Hilton Birmingham Metropole Hotel

Paul Wesley & Ian Somerhalder,
Charles Michael Davis, Matt Davis,
Shaun Sipos, Chase Coleman
... and more tba.

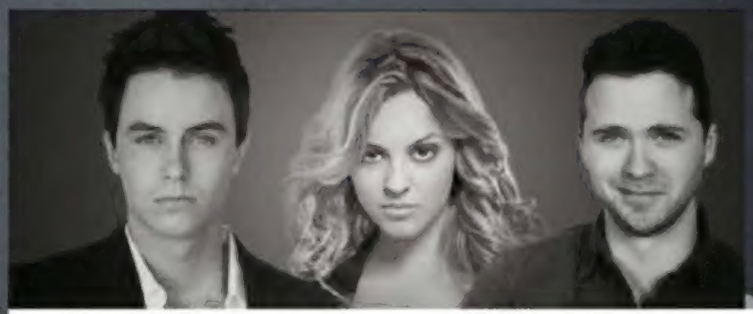
Prophecy

Buffy the Vampire Slayer & Angel the Series

17th – 19th June 2016

Hilton Birmingham Metropole Hotel

Alyson Hannigan & Alexis Denisof,
Christian Kane,
Tom Lenk, Stephanie Romanov
... and more tba.



WOLFS BANE 4

Teen Wolf

16th – 18th September 2016

Renaissance London Heathrow Hotel

Gage Golightly,
Ryan Kelly,
Stephen Lunsford
... and more tba.

All actors appear subject to work commitment.

Find us online at
/rogueevents

ROGUE EVENTS

+++ Tickets available at rogueevent.co.uk +++ Adults: £112.00 +++ Children £77.00 +++

IncognitoComics.com
EST 1909

INTO COMICS?

OVER 1 MILLION ITEMS FROM THE 1930'S ONWARDS.
COMICS - ACTION FIGURES - TOYS - STATUES - BUSTS
AUTOGRAPHS - GRAPHIC NOVELS - MANGA

75,000 UNIQUE ITEMS FOR SALE ONLINE!

JOB DONE!

INCOGNITO COMICS & COLLECTABLES
PO BOX 431, DOVER, KENT, CT16 9ED
TEL 01304 832335
EMAIL: SALES@INCOGNITOCOMICS.CO.UK

eBAY POWER SELLER - AMAZON PREFERRED SELLER
LISTED AS: INCOGNITO COMICS AND COLLECTABLES

JOIN US @ INCOGNITOCOMICS

All Marvel characters and the distinctive likeness(es) thereof are Trademarks & Copyright © 1941-2012 Marvel Characters, Inc. ALL RIGHTS RESERVED.

9012